VISIT…

MEL BAY PRESENTS

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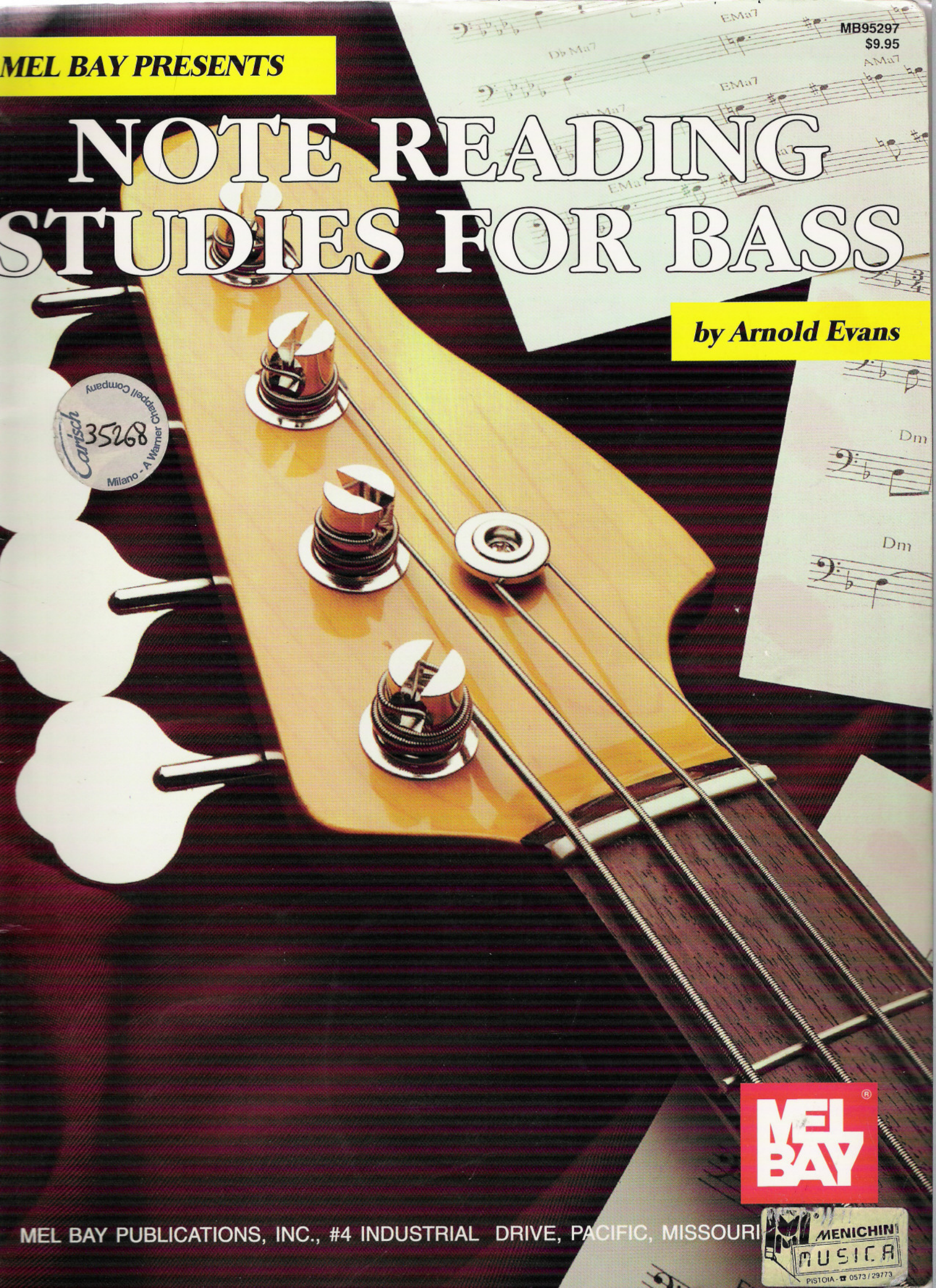
NOTE READING STUDIES FOR BASS

by Arnold Evans



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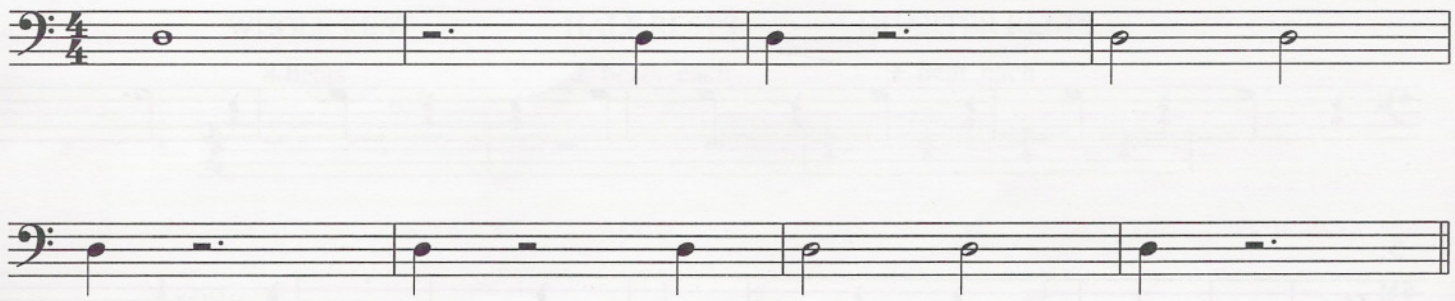
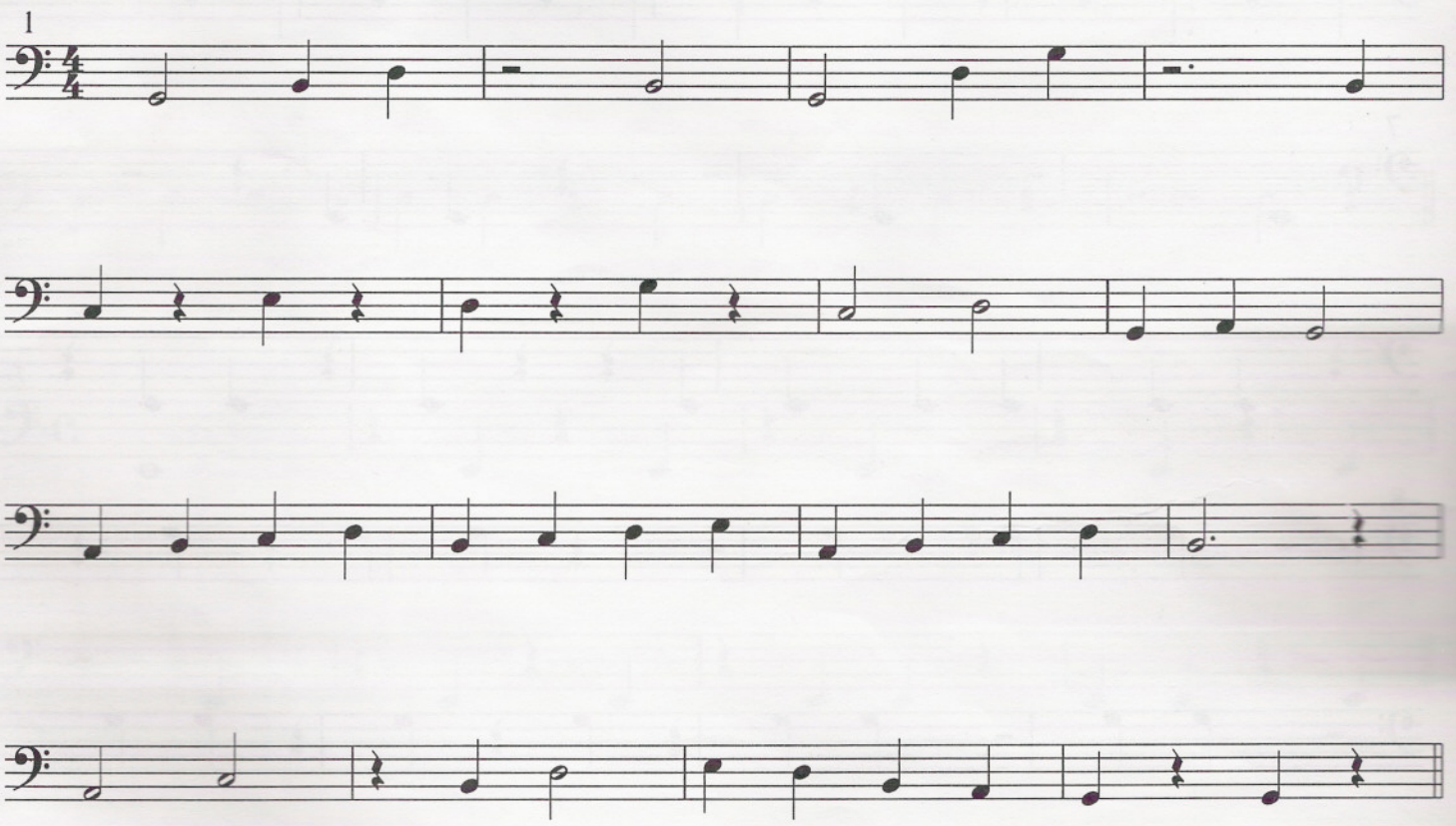
Here we introduce the dotted half rest, which equals 3 beats:



ETUDES

(Using *natural* notes, various rhythms and rests)



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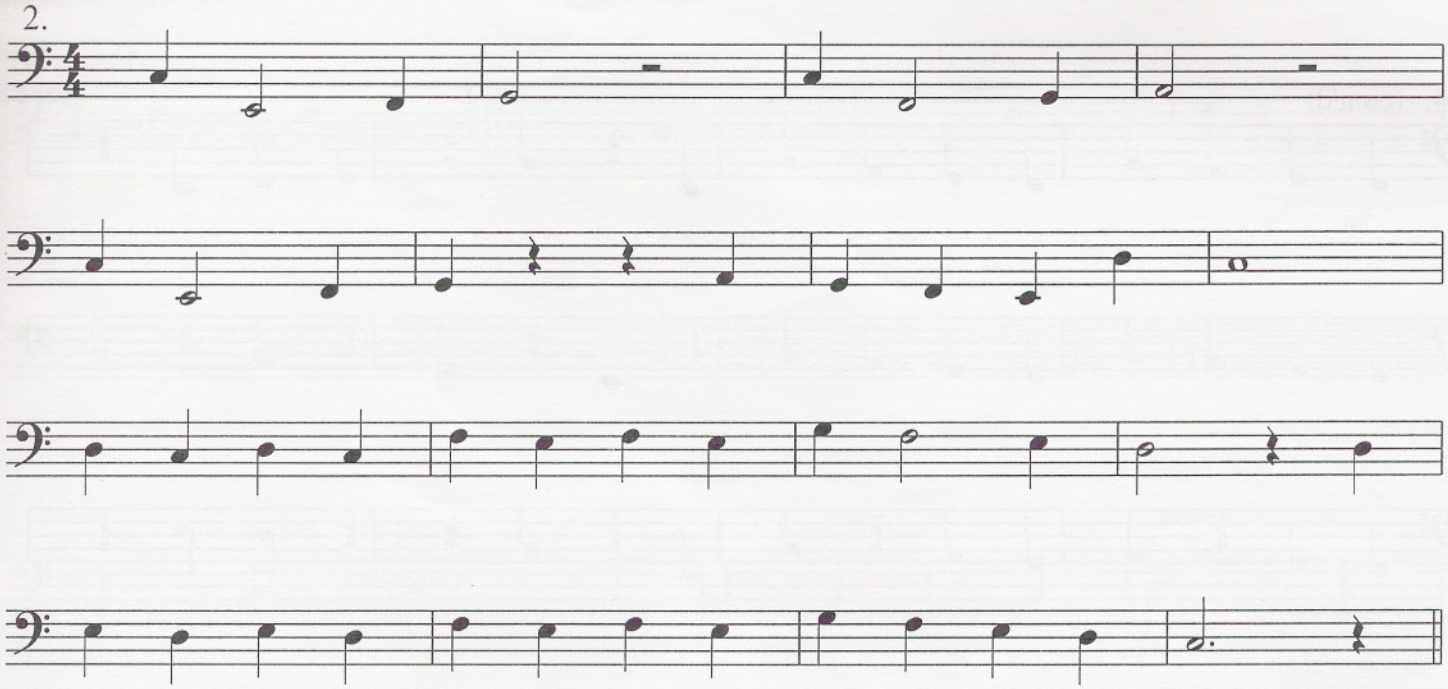

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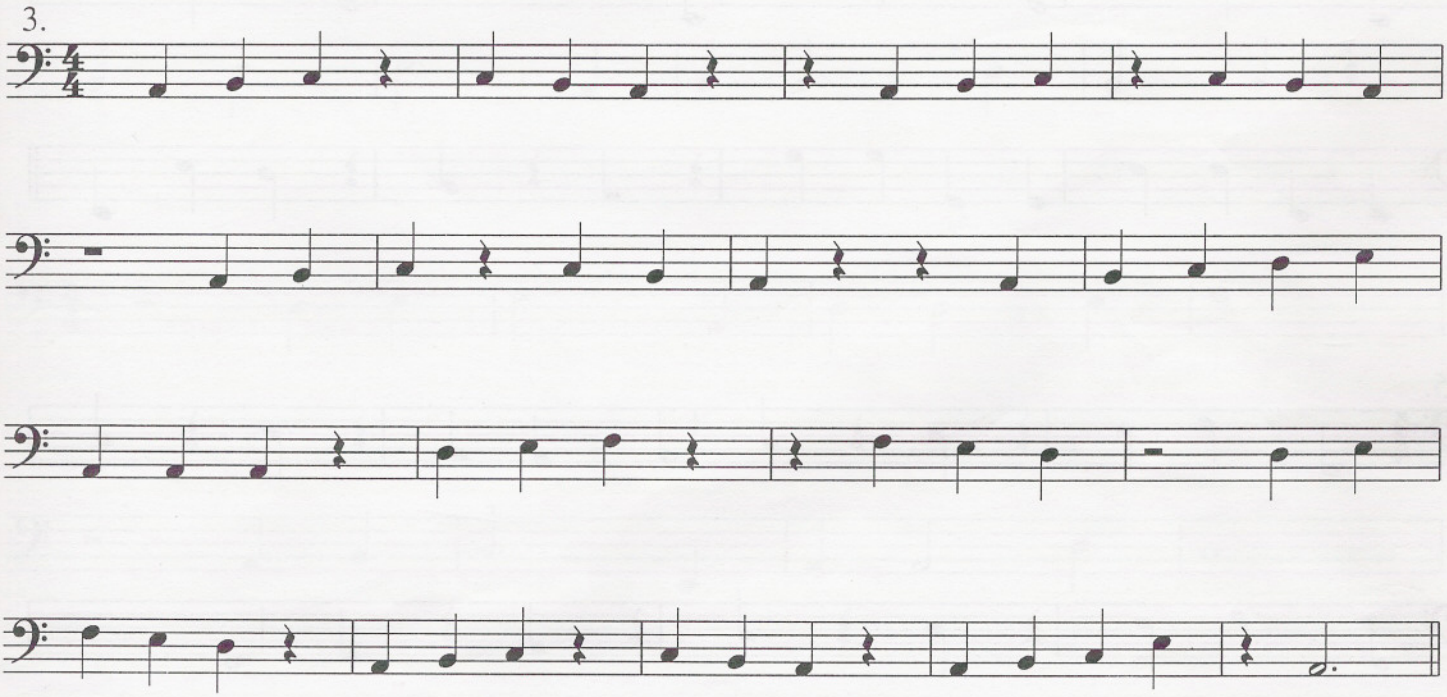

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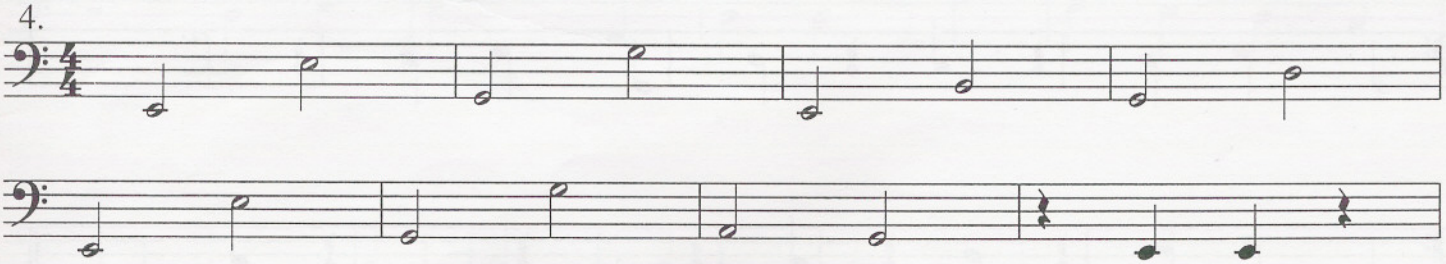

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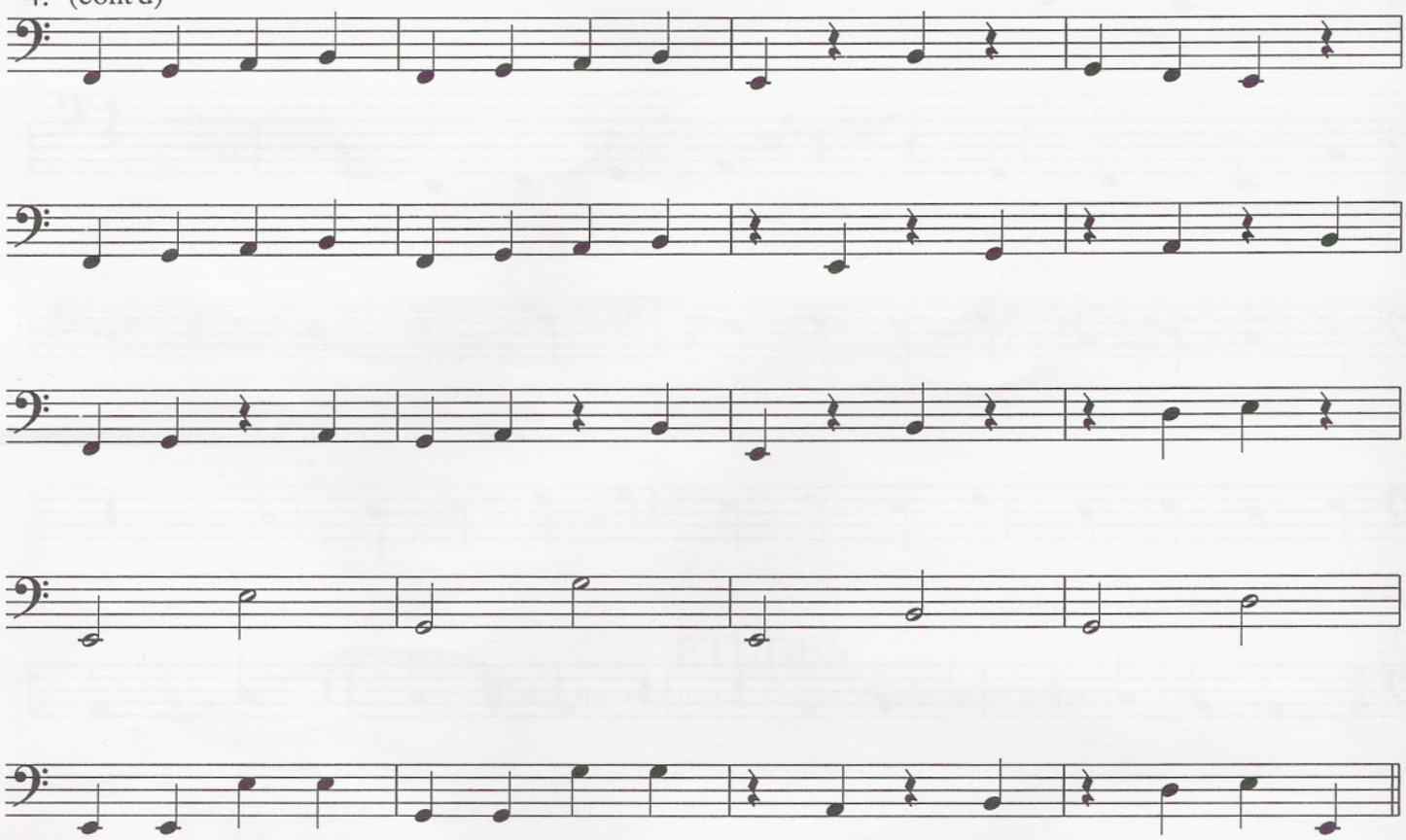

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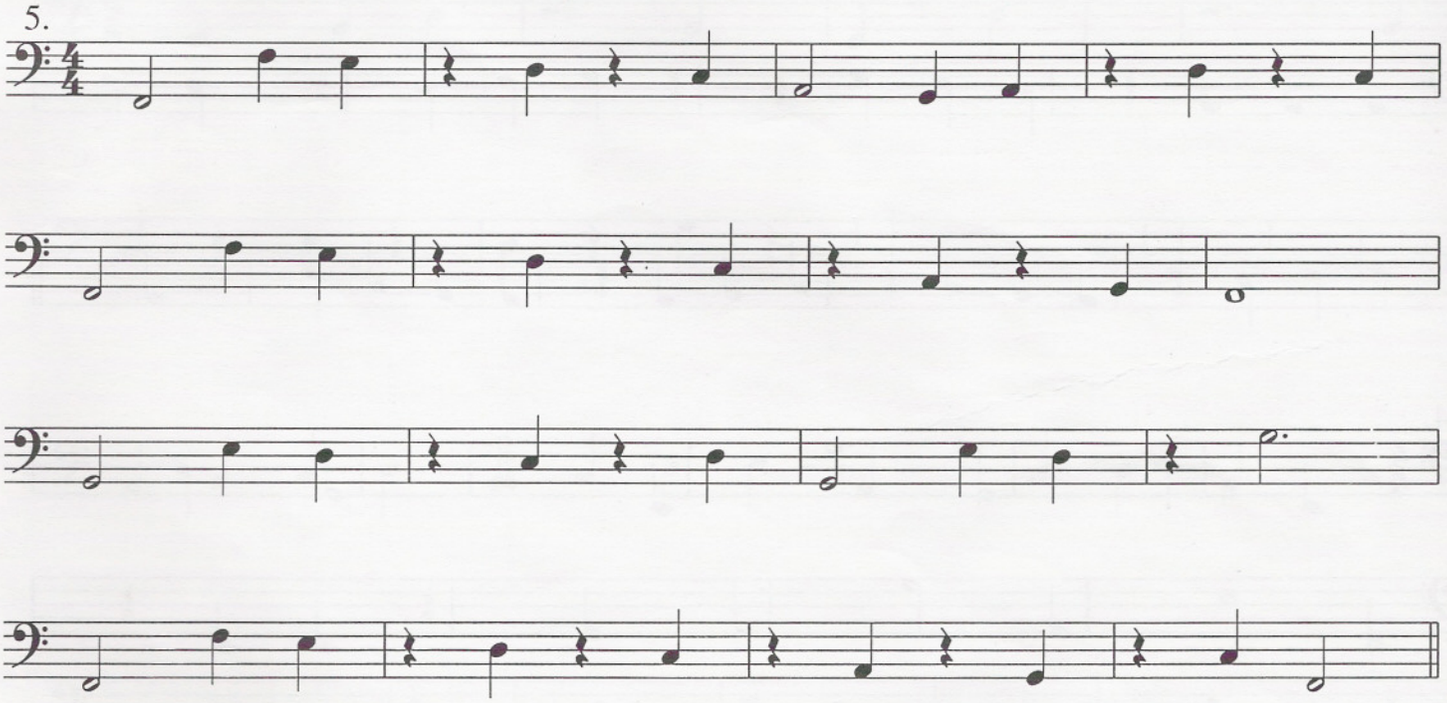

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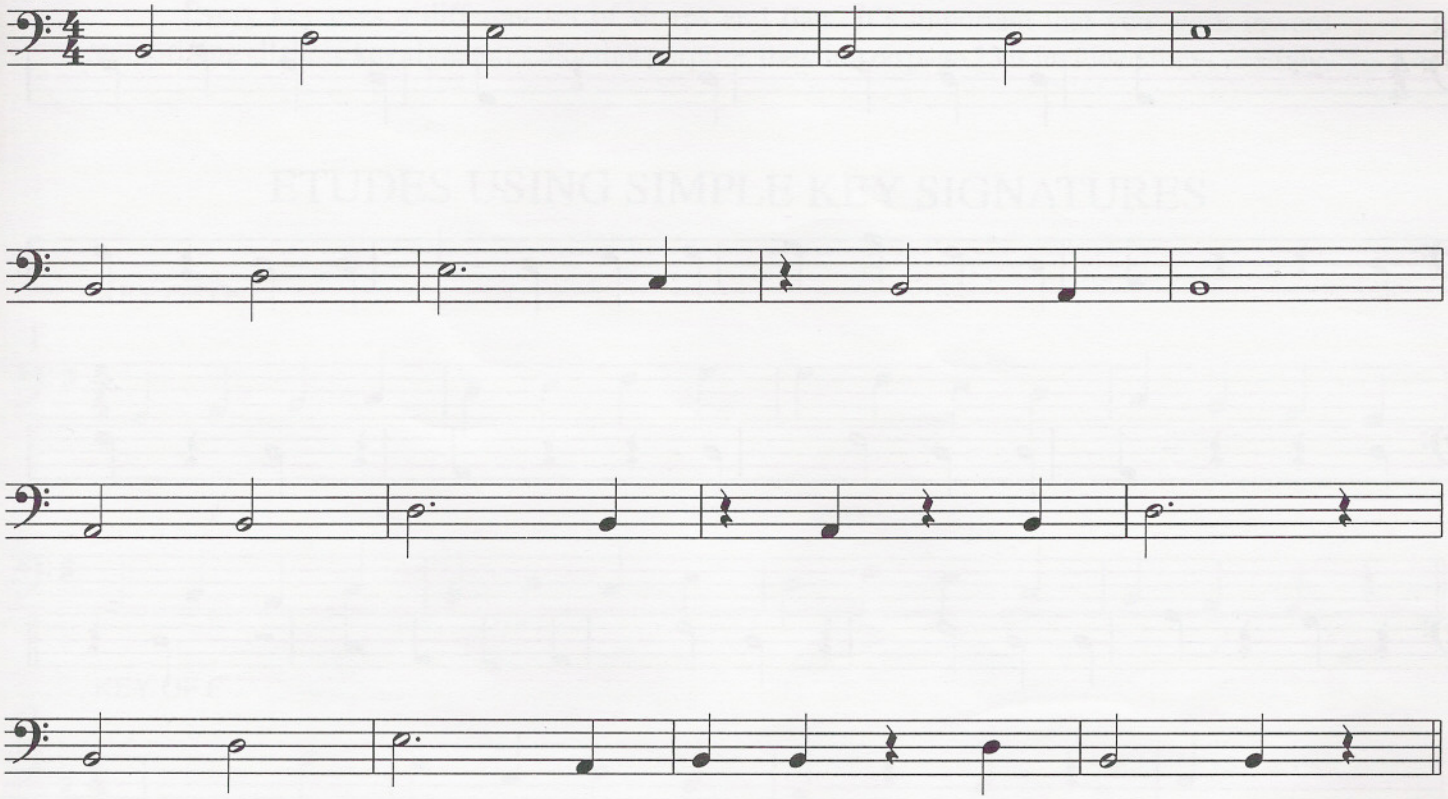

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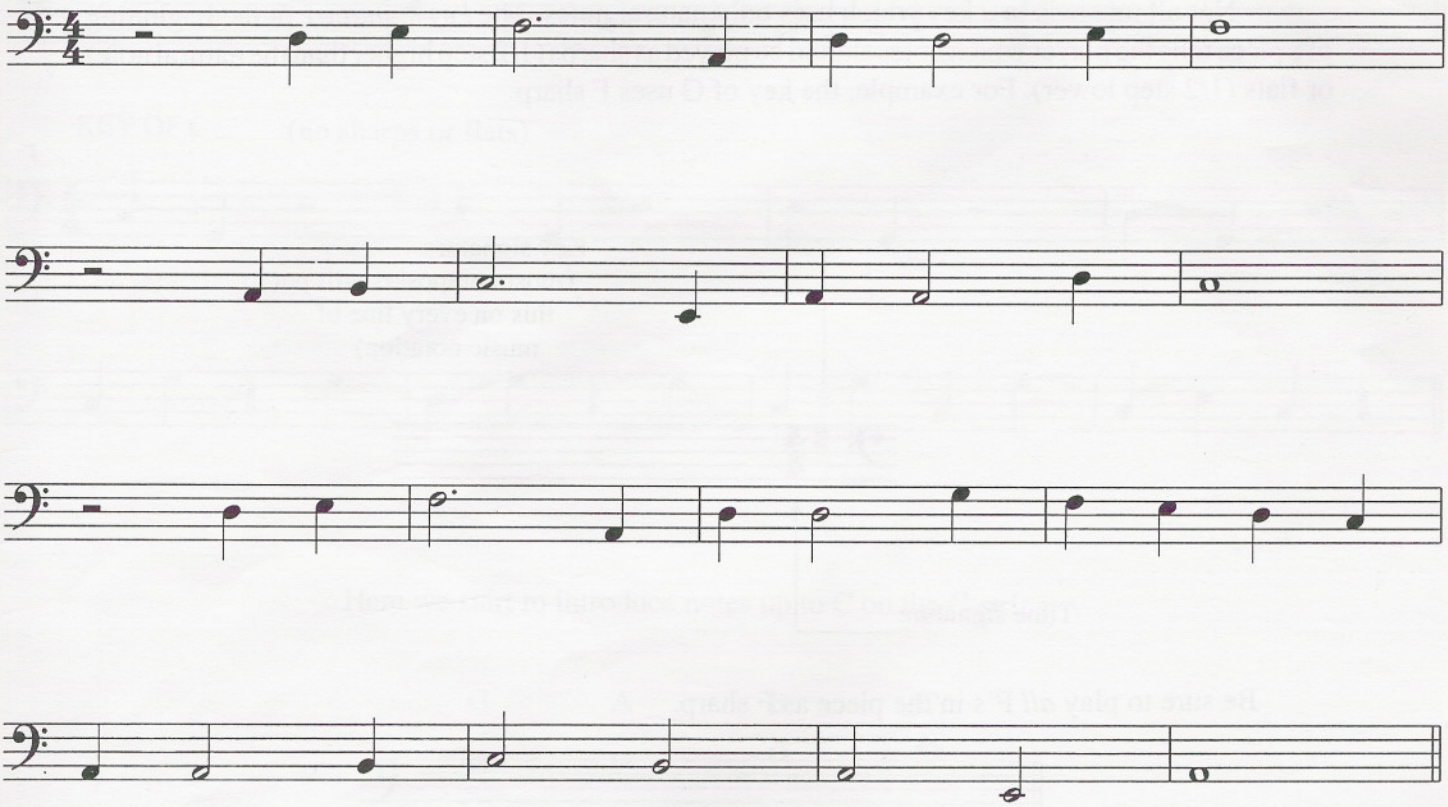

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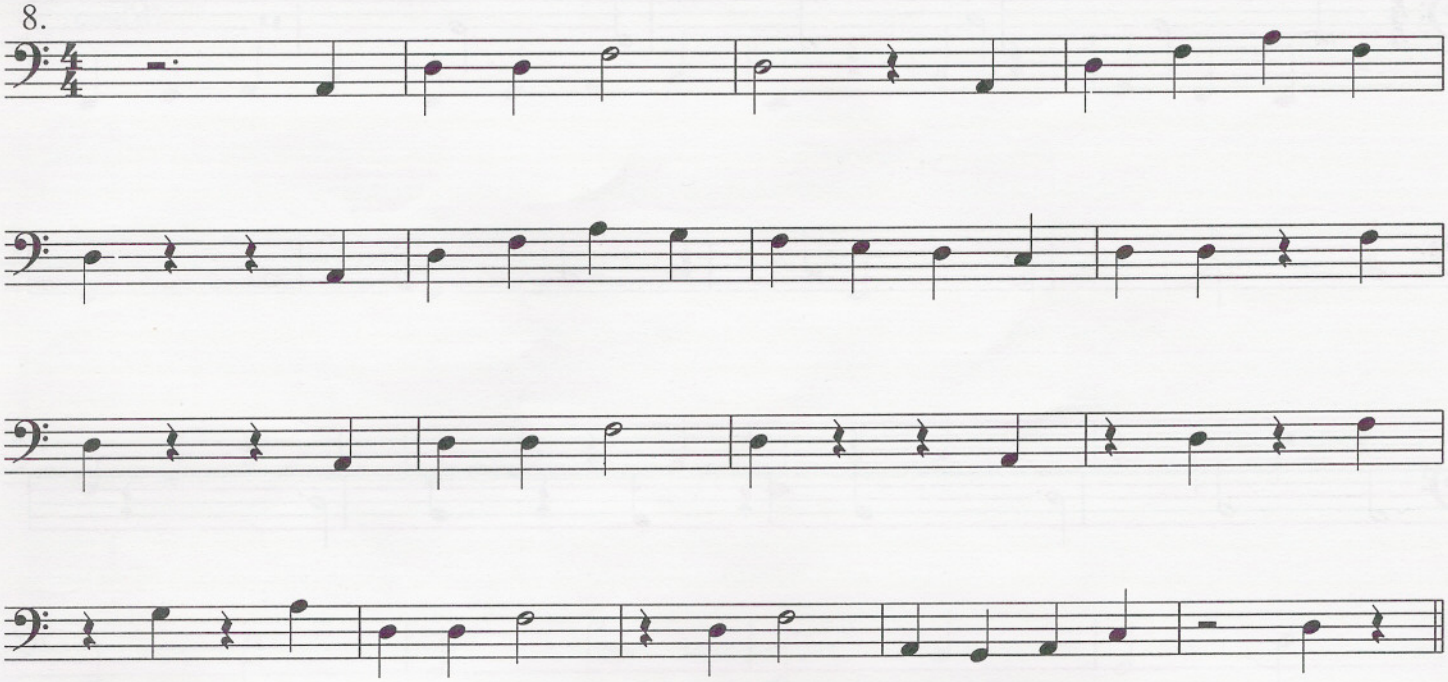
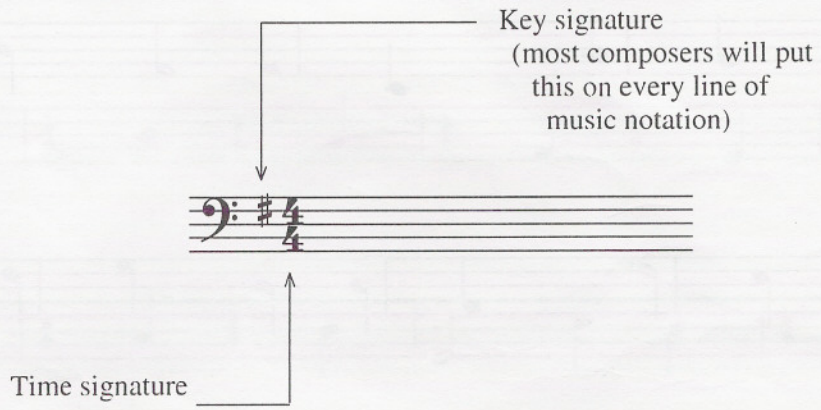


KEYS & KEY SIGNATURES

Not all music is in a key which uses only natural notes. The *key signature* at the beginning of a piece tells the player which notes should be played as sharps (1/2 step higher than the natural note) or flats (1/2 step lower). For example, the key of G uses F sharp:



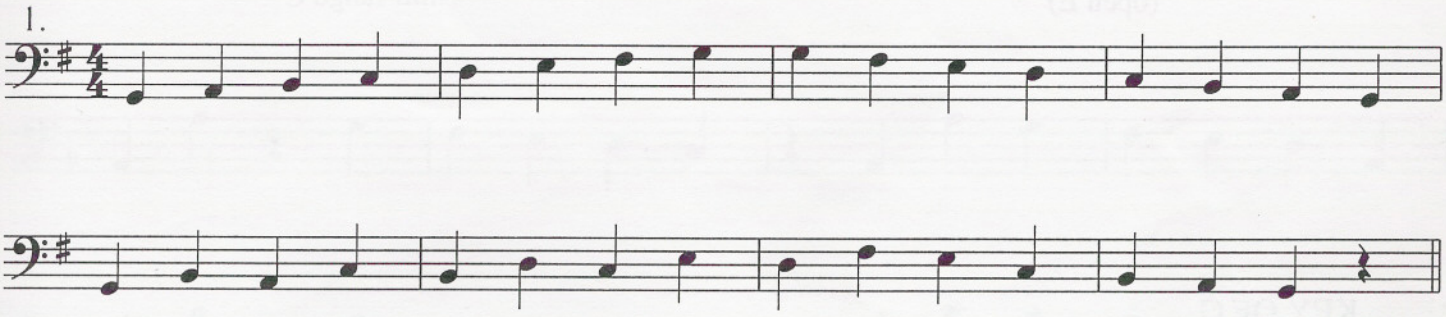
Be sure to play *all* F's in the piece as F sharp.

Every key uses a different set of sharps and flats. It's important that you work toward memorizing all these key signatures. For that purpose, the chart on page 23 is included for your study.

ETUDES USING SIMPLE KEY SIGNATURES

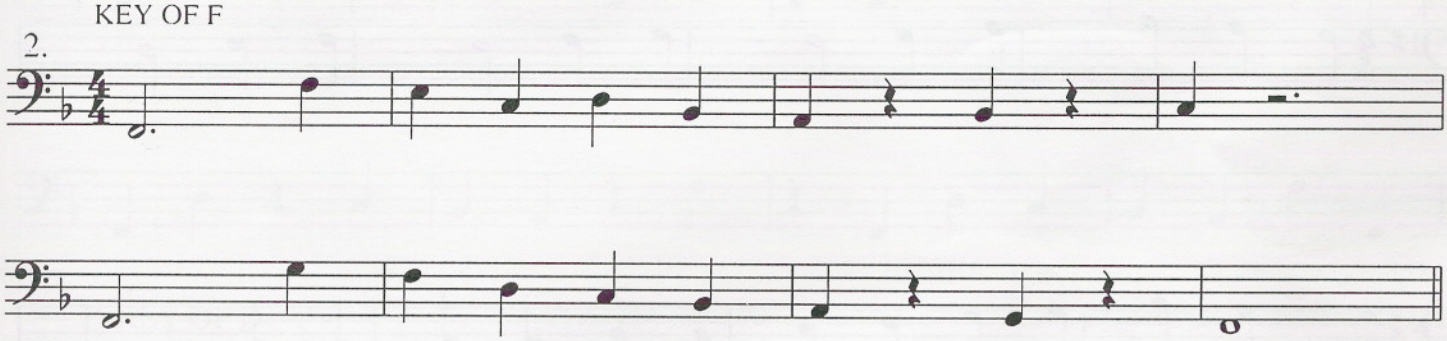
KEY OF G

1.



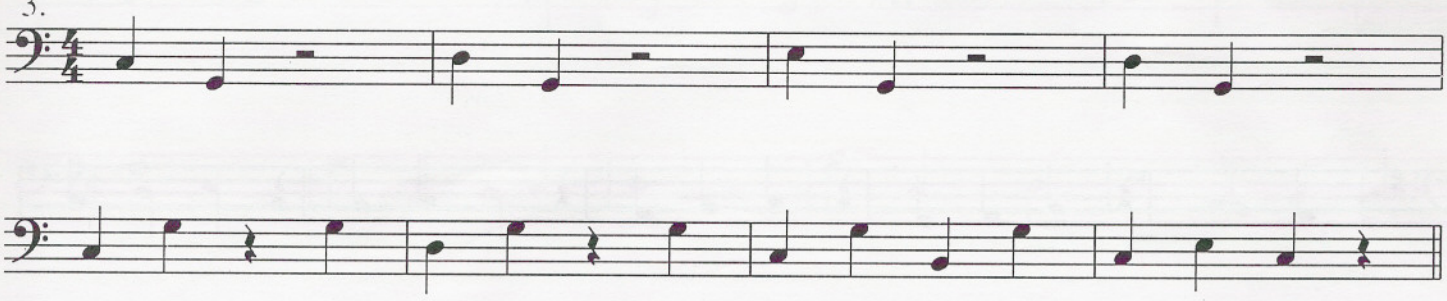
KEY OF F

2.

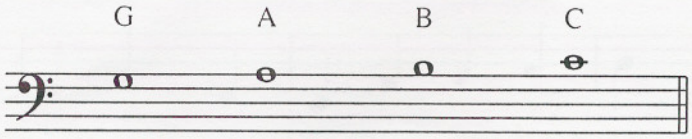


KEY OF C (no sharps or flats)

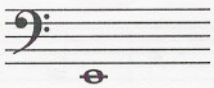
3.



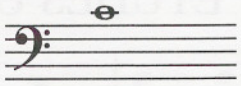
Here we start to introduce notes up to C on the G string.



You should be able to play all the notes between the open E and this mid-range C without straying too far from your lowest position, so we'll confine our reading studies to this range for now. Consult your teacher or your technique method book if you're unsure about what fingerings to use.



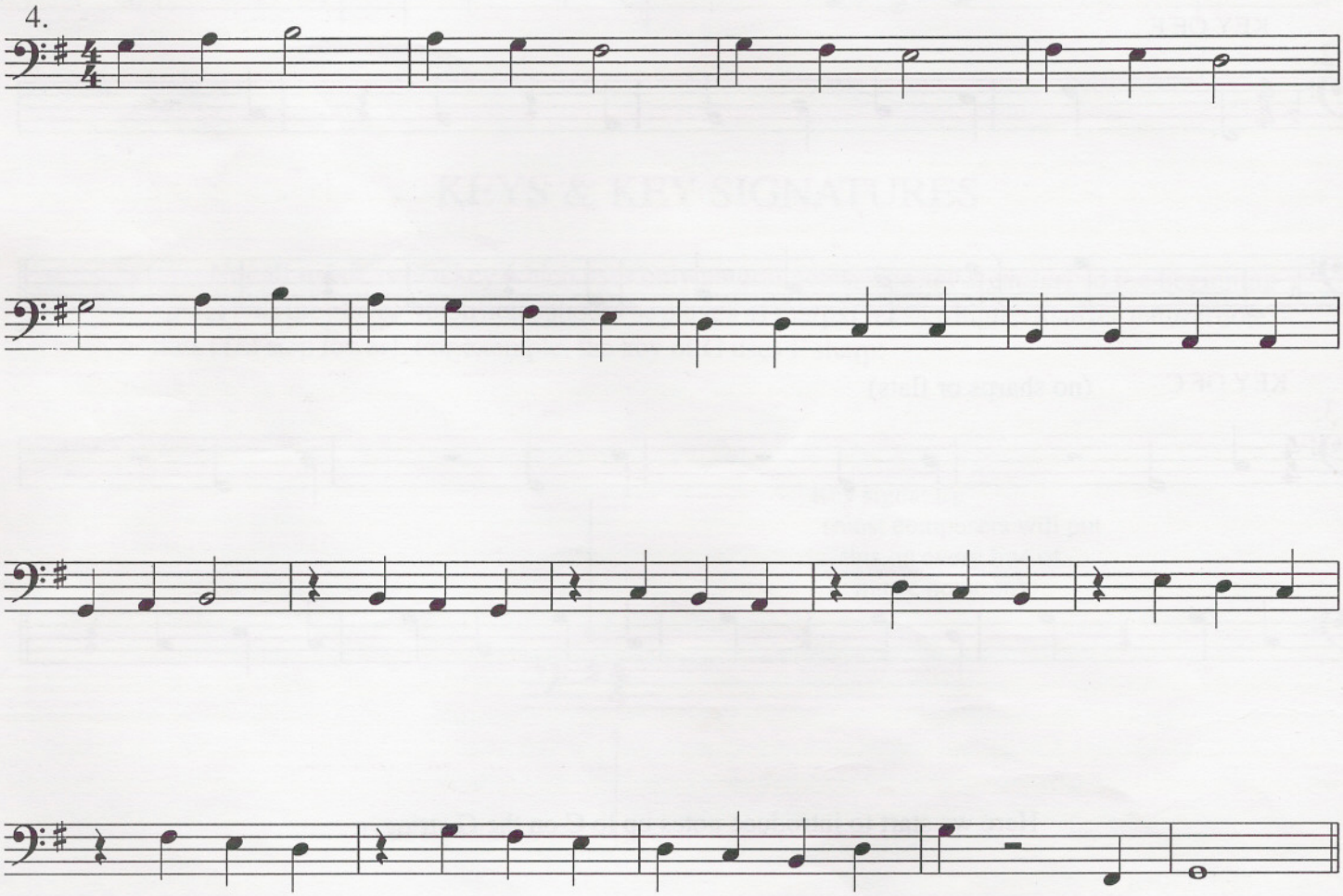
(open E)



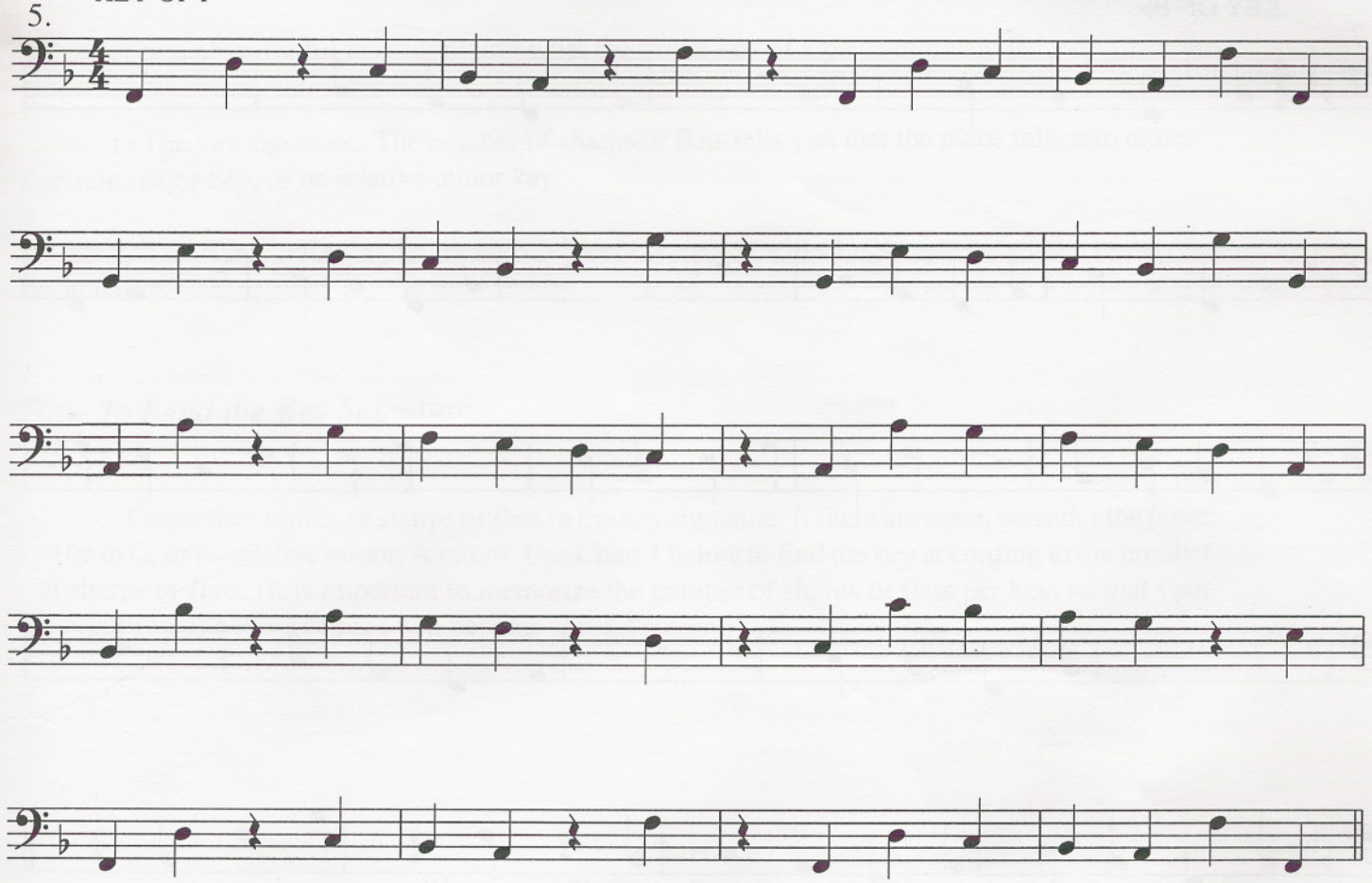
mid-range C

KEY OF G

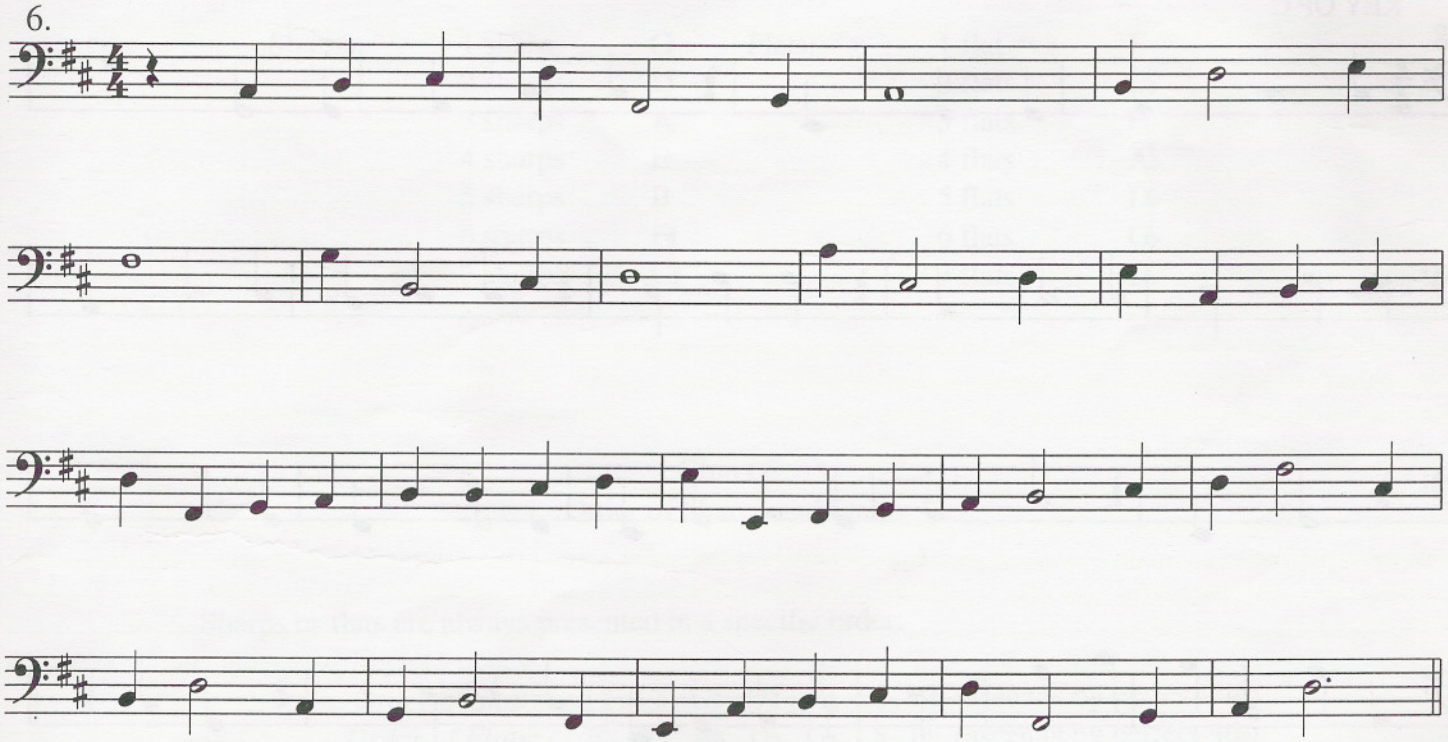
4.



5. KEY OF F

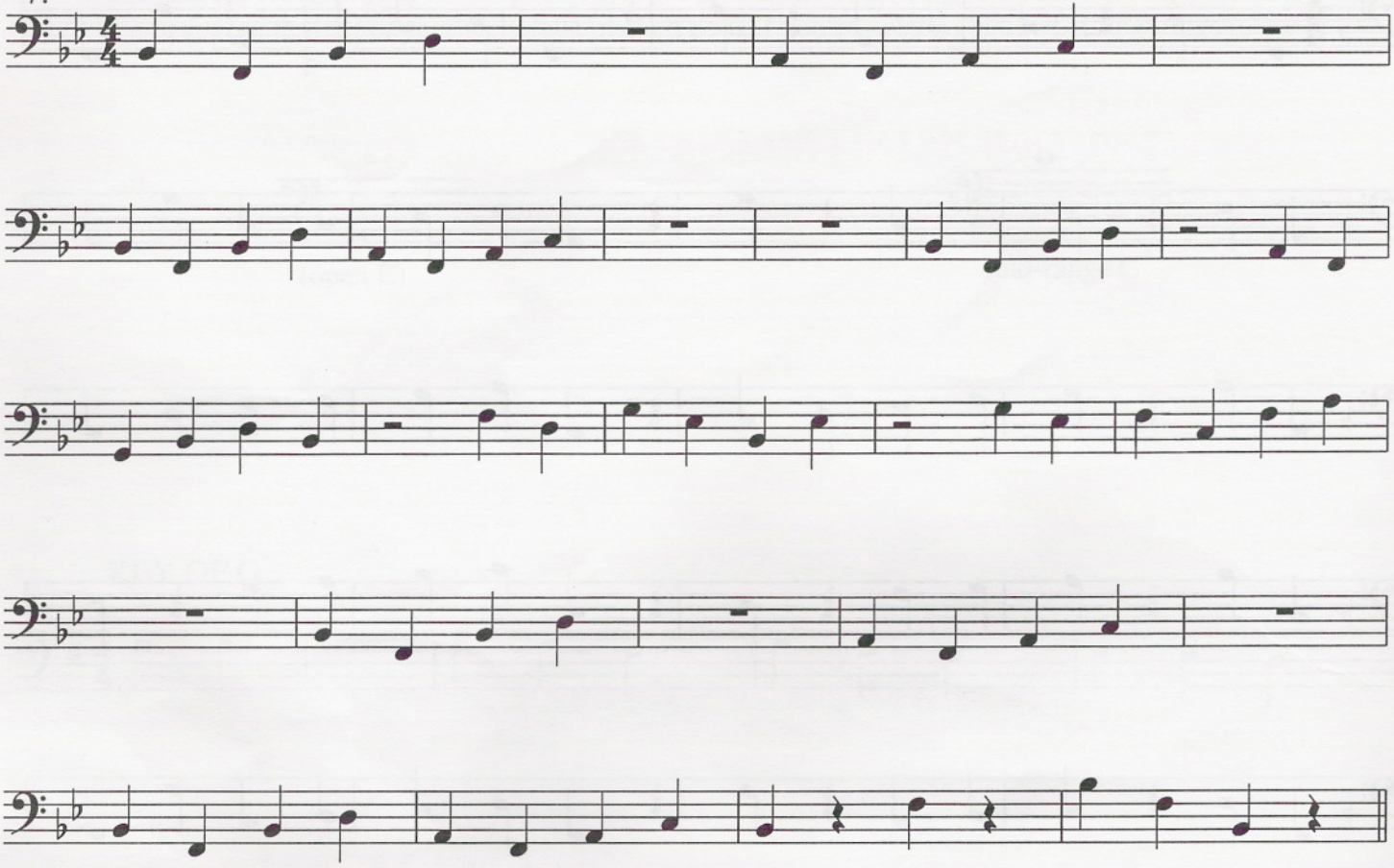


6. KEY OF D



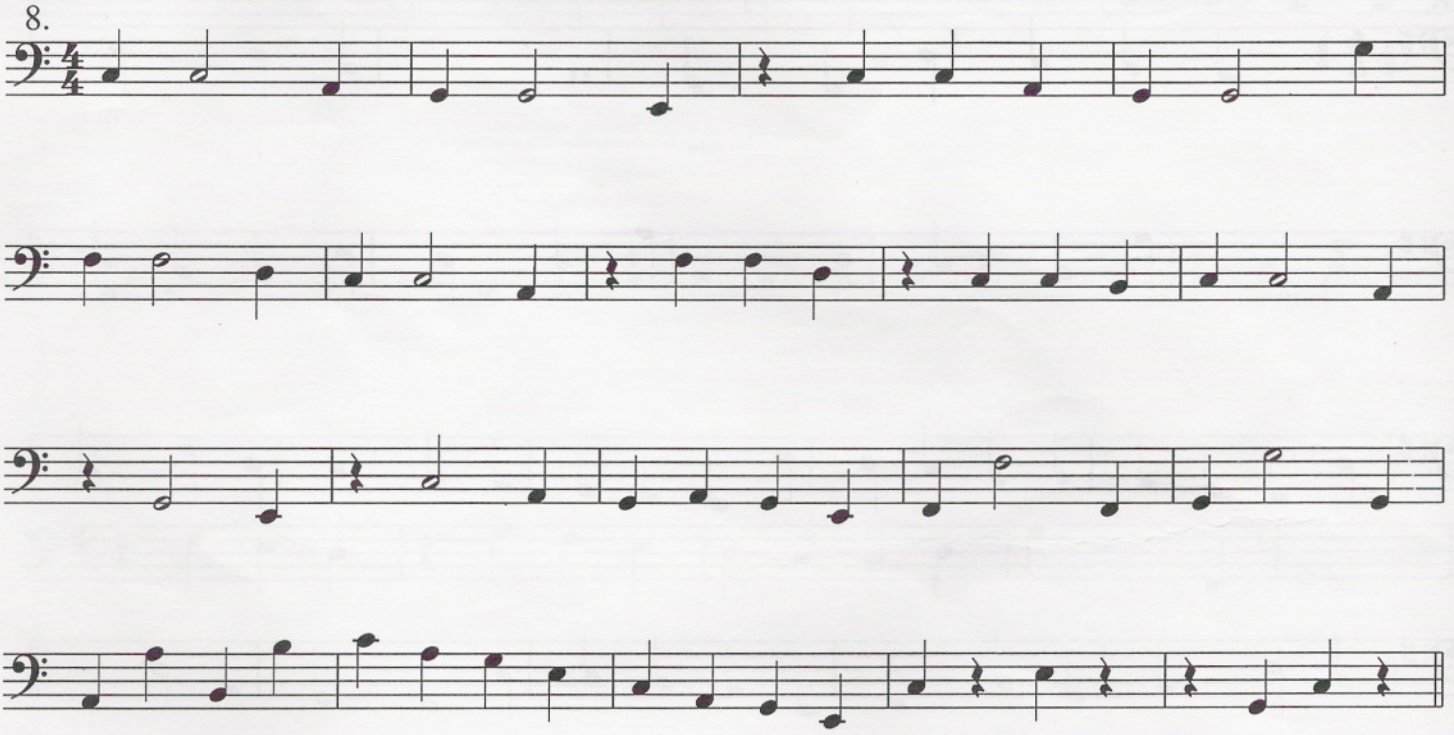
KEY OF B♭

7.



KEY OF C

8.



How To Determine the Key of a Piece of Music

There are two clues useful in determining what the actual key of a piece of music is:

1) The key signature: The number of sharps or flats tells you that the piece falls into either a certain major key, or its relative minor key.

2) The notes in the beginning and ending of the piece will usually emphasize the tonic, or key tonality.

How To Read the Key Signature

Count the number of sharps or flats in the key signature. If there are none, consider the piece to be in C, or its relative minor, A minor. Use Chart 1 below to find the key according to the number of sharps or flats. (It is important to memorize the number of sharps or flats per key, so that your recognition of key signatures will become second nature.)

Chart 1
Number of Sharps or Flats Per Major Key

Sharps:	1 sharp	G	Flats:	1 flat	F
	2 sharps	D		2 flats	B♭
	3 sharps	A		3 flats	E♭
	4 sharps	E		4 flats	A♭
	5 sharps	B		5 flats	D♭
	6 sharps	F♯		6 flats	G♭
	7 sharps	C♯		7 flats	C♭

Chart 2
Order of Sharps and Flats

Sharps or flats are always presented in a specific order:

Order of Sharps: F♯ , C♯ , G♯ , D♯ , A♯ , E♯ , B♯ (ascends by perfect 5th)
Order of Flats: B♭ , E♭ , A♭ , D♭ , G♭ , C♭ , F♭ (ascends by perfect 4th)

RELATIVE MINOR KEYS

Every major key has a relative minor key which uses the same key signature. This key is located three 1/2 steps below the major key.

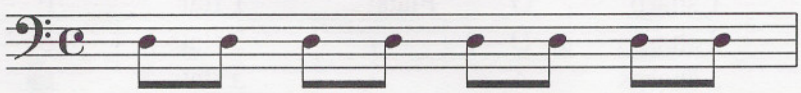
e.g., C : Relative Minor Am

NOTE: Not every piece of music is written with a key signature. Very difficult pieces which move within several keys often dispense with the key signature and depend on individual accidentals instead. The same is true of atonal and extended-tonal music.

Occasionally, a composer will use a key signature which seems foreign to the tonality of the piece. Usually this will be because the piece is written in an unusual Mode. (Modes are special scales which invoke unusual tonalities and chord relationships.)

EIGHTH NOTES

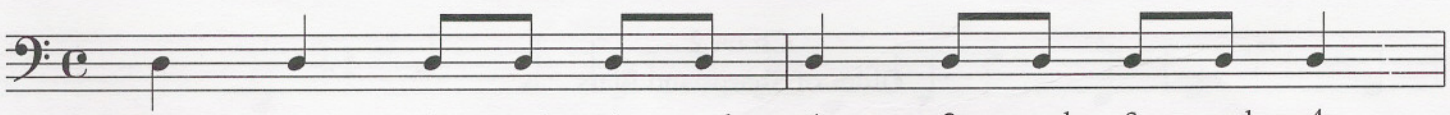
Eighth notes are played half as long as quarter notes; e.g., two eighth notes fit in the time-space of one quarter note.



COUNT: 1 – and – 2 – and – 3 – and – 4 – and

Eighth notes can be written singly: ♪ or in groups of two, three, or four, depending on the particular piece of music.

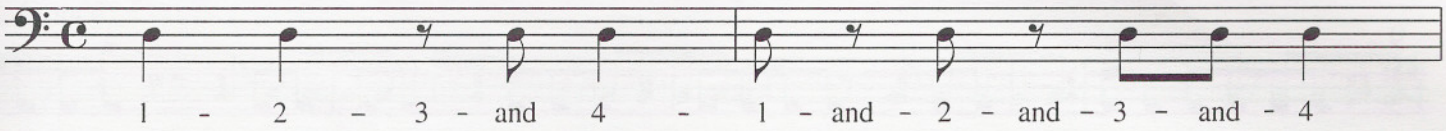
Play:



COUNT: 1 - 2 - 3 - and - 4 - and 1 - 2 - and - 3 - and - 4

An eighth rest looks like this 𝄾 and takes up the same time-space as an eighth note.

Play:



Mixed rhythm exercises:

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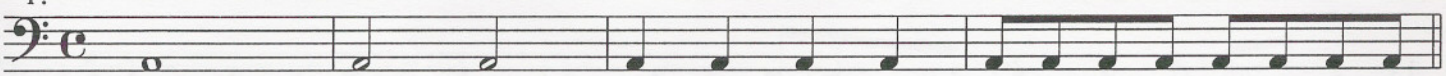

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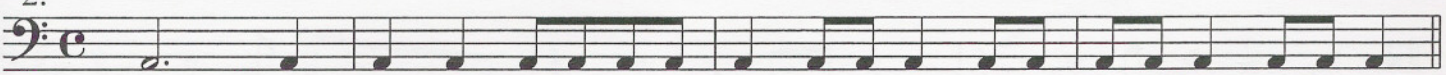

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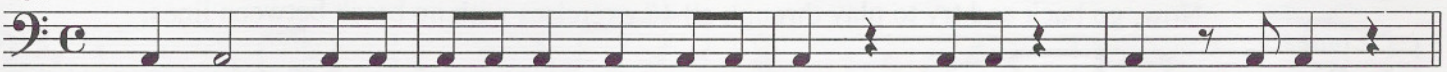

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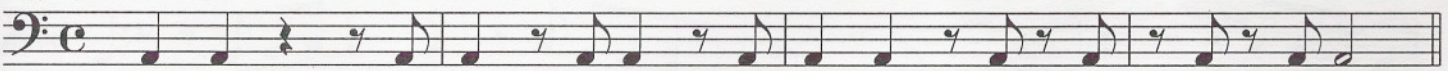

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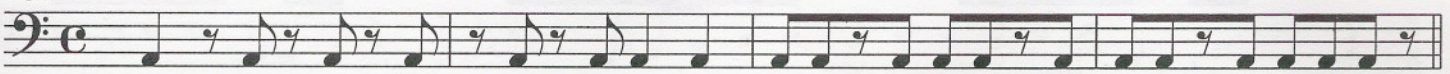
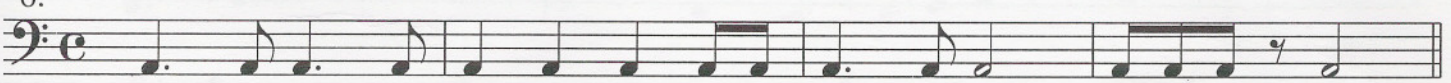


Here we introduce the dotted quarter note ♩. which assumes 1 1/2 times its normal duration, equalling one quarter note plus one eighth note.

6.



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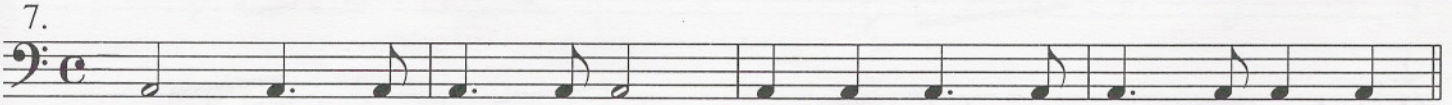

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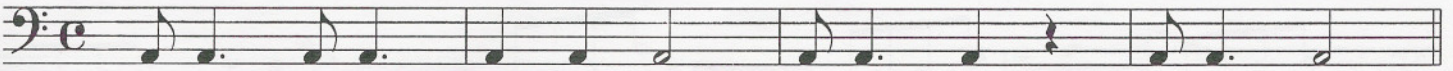

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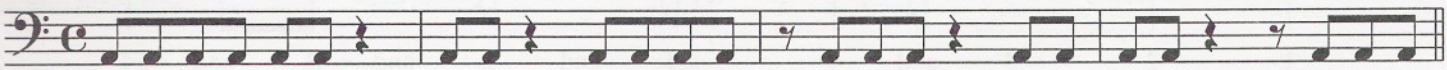

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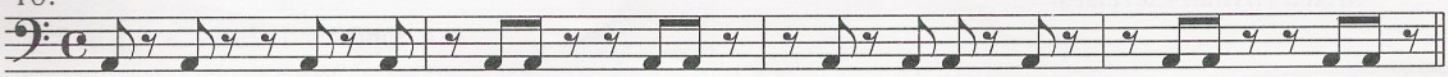

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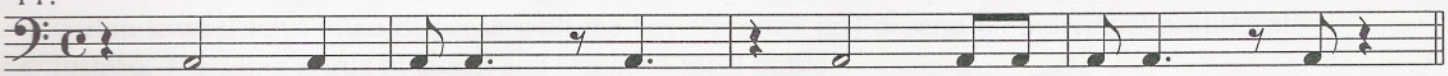

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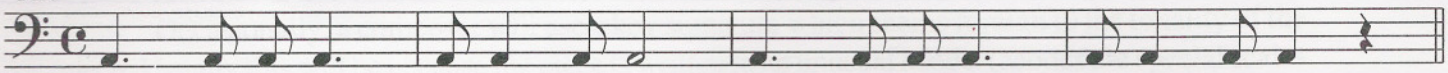
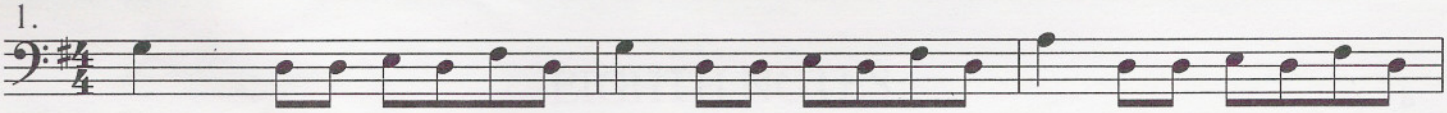
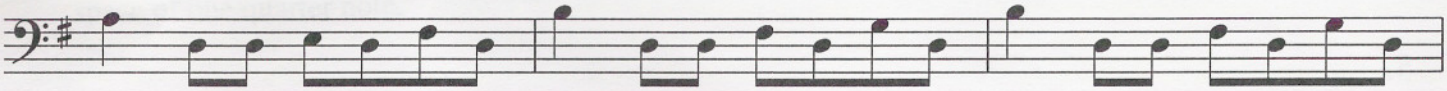


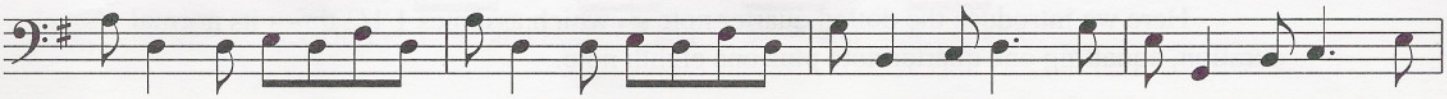
Now, go back and try to play through all 12 exercises with no break between lines.

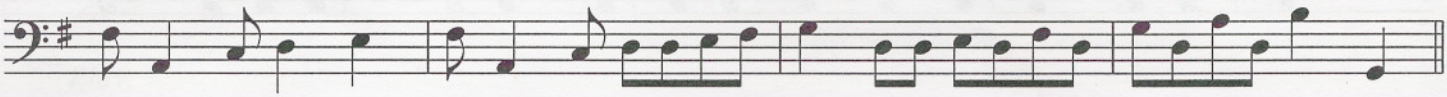
Etudes:

1.









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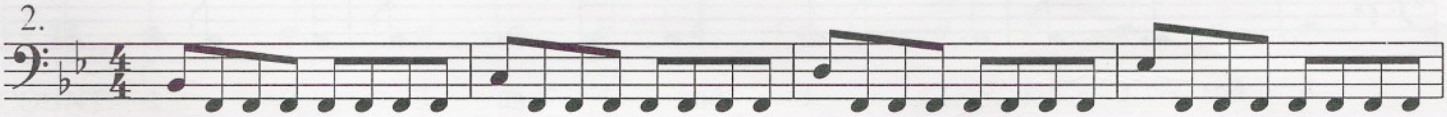

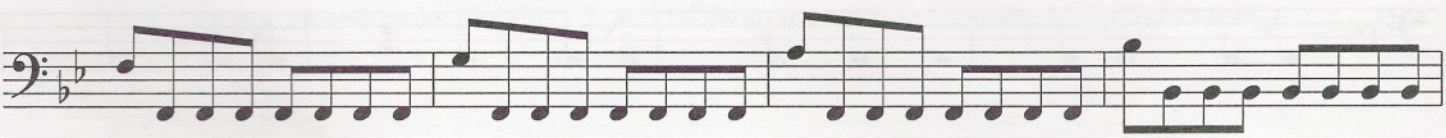

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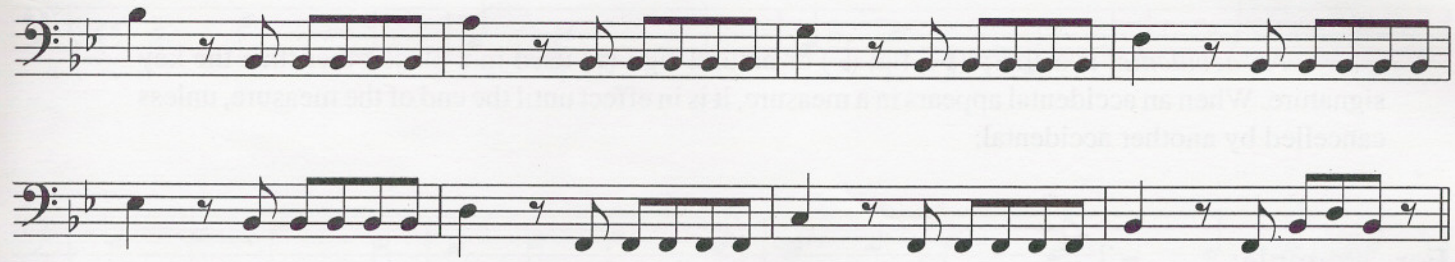

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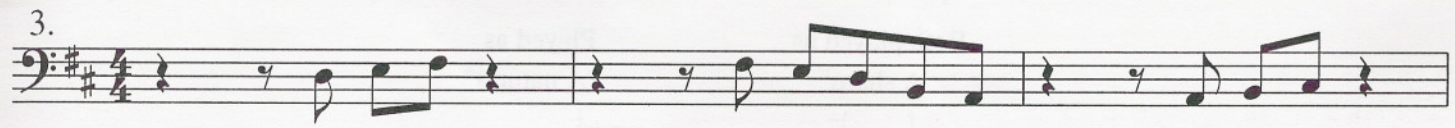

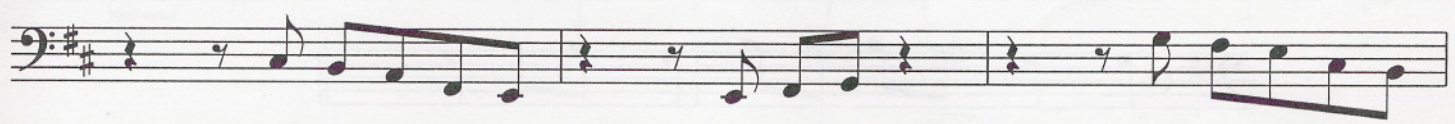

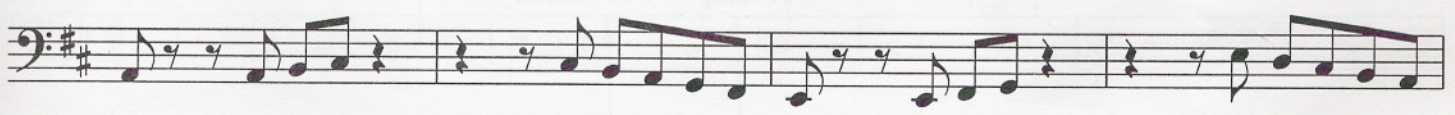

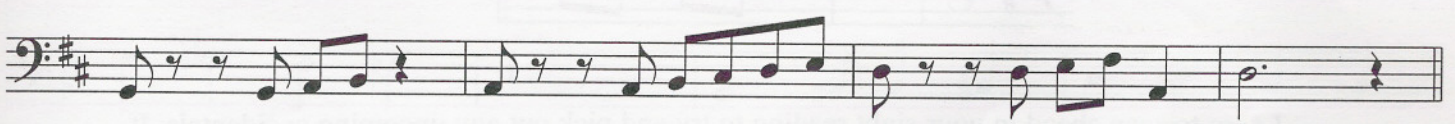

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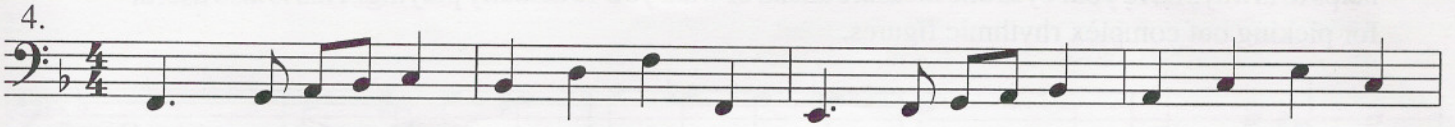
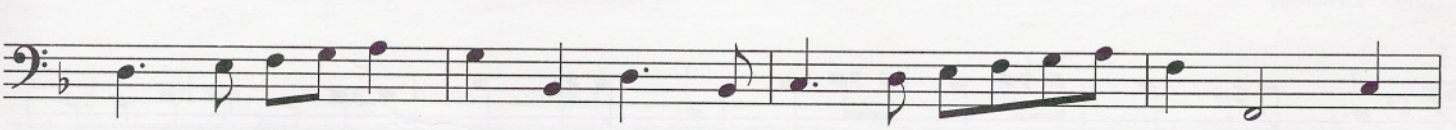
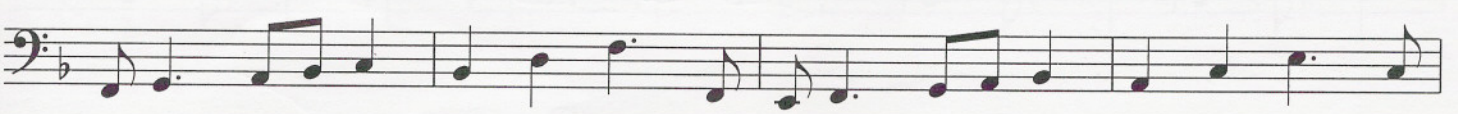
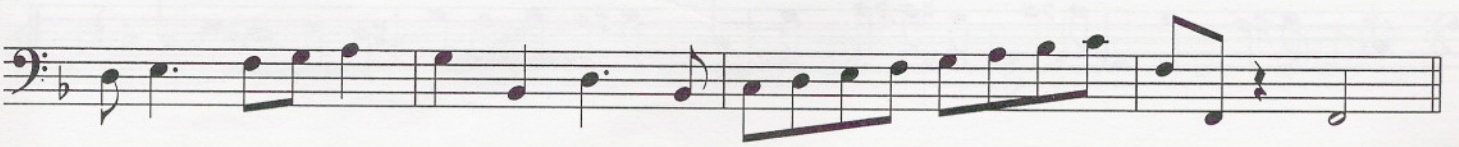




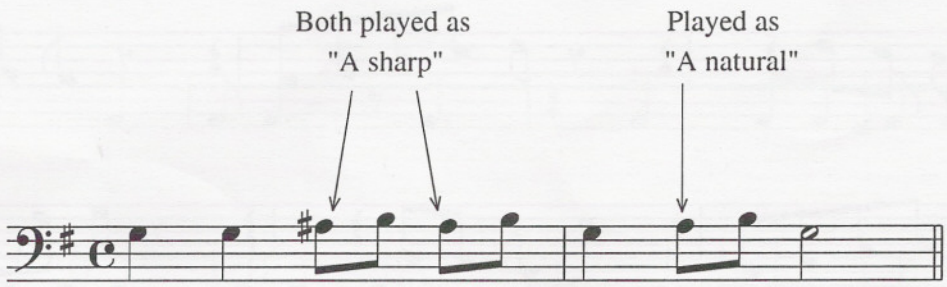


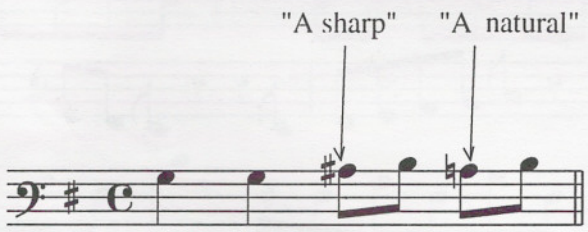


ACCIDENTALS

An *accidental* is a sharp (♯), flat (♭) or natural sign (♮) used in a place other than the key signature. When an accidental appears in a measure, it is in effect until the end of the measure, unless cancelled by another accidental:

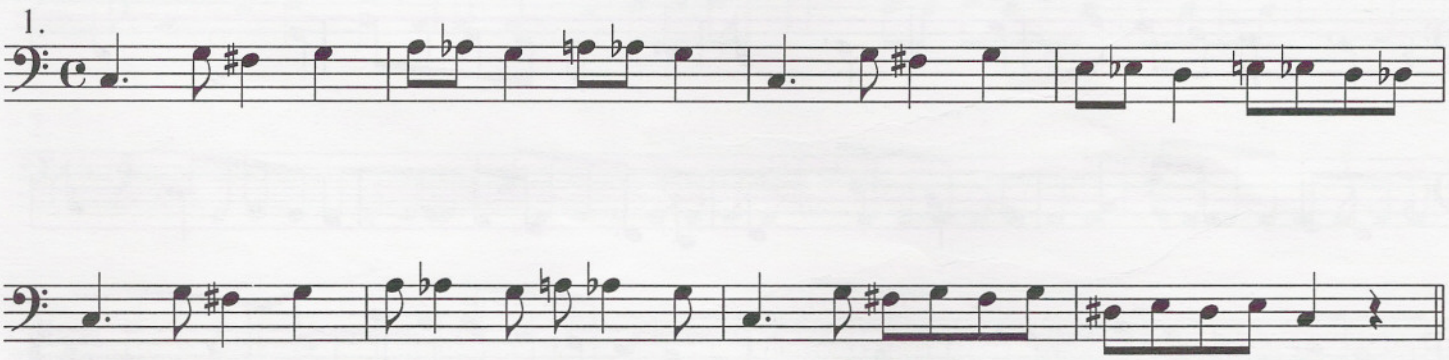
For example:



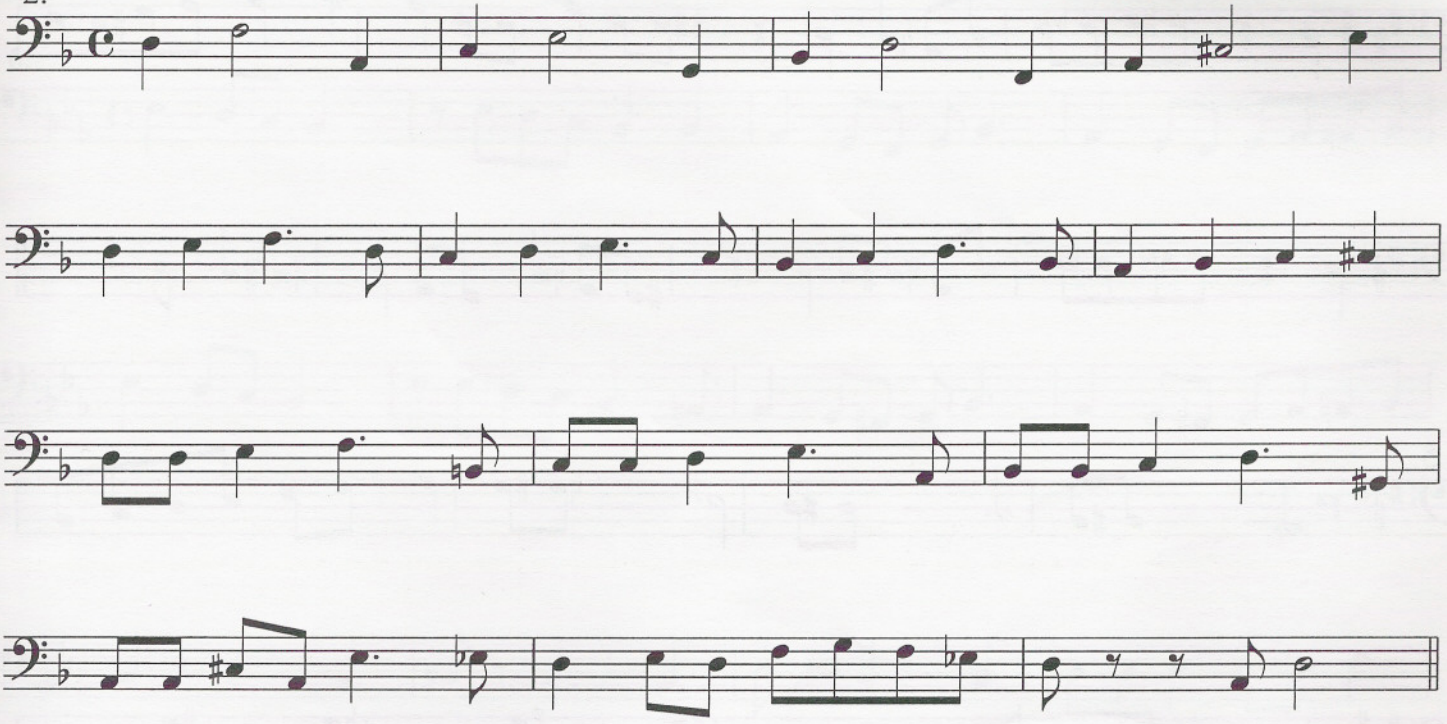


Learn to scan ahead in your sight reading to try and pick out any upcoming accidentals. It helps to always have your eyes one measure ahead of what you're actually playing. This is also useful for picking out complex rhythmic figures.

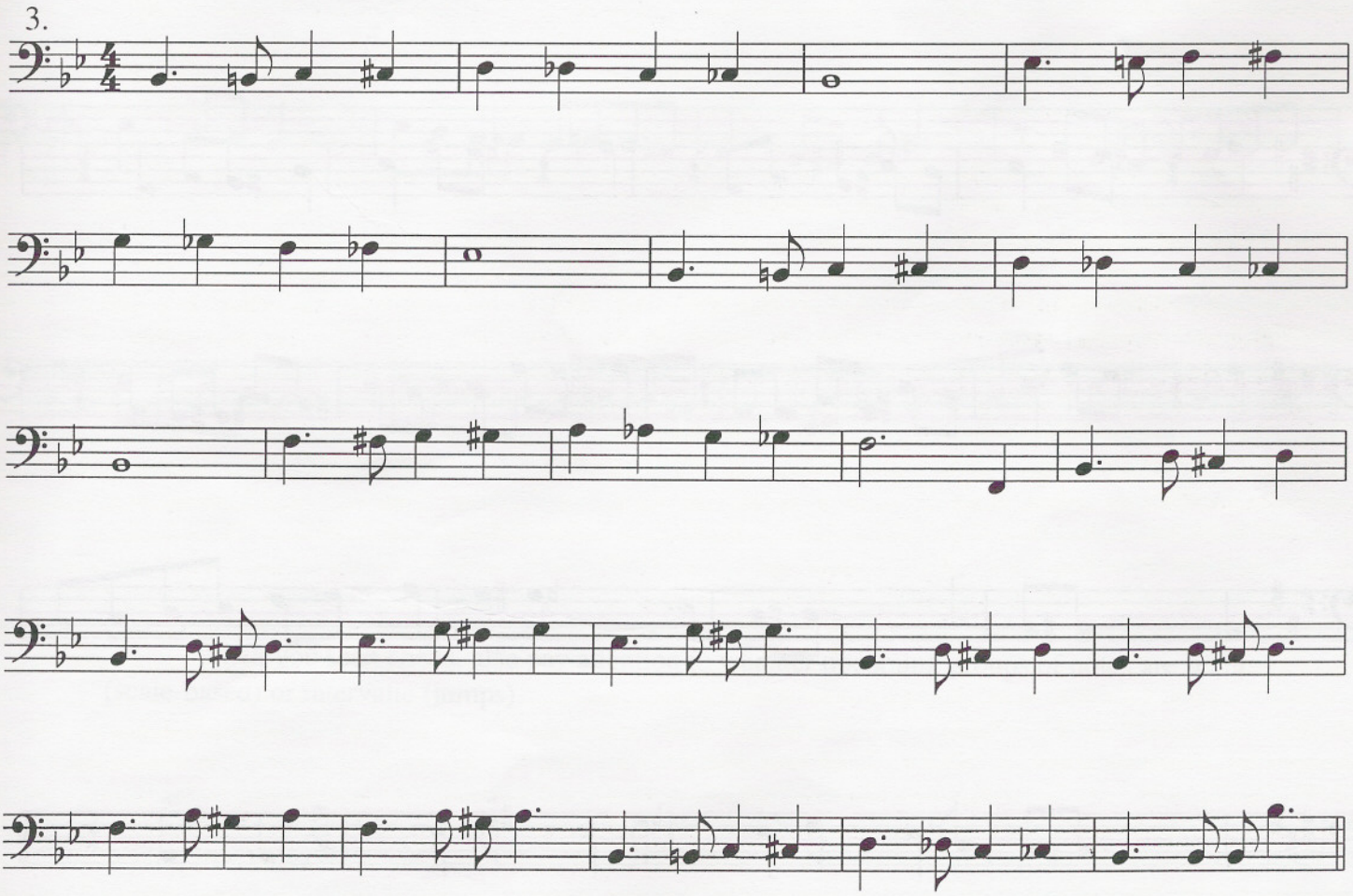
Etudes:

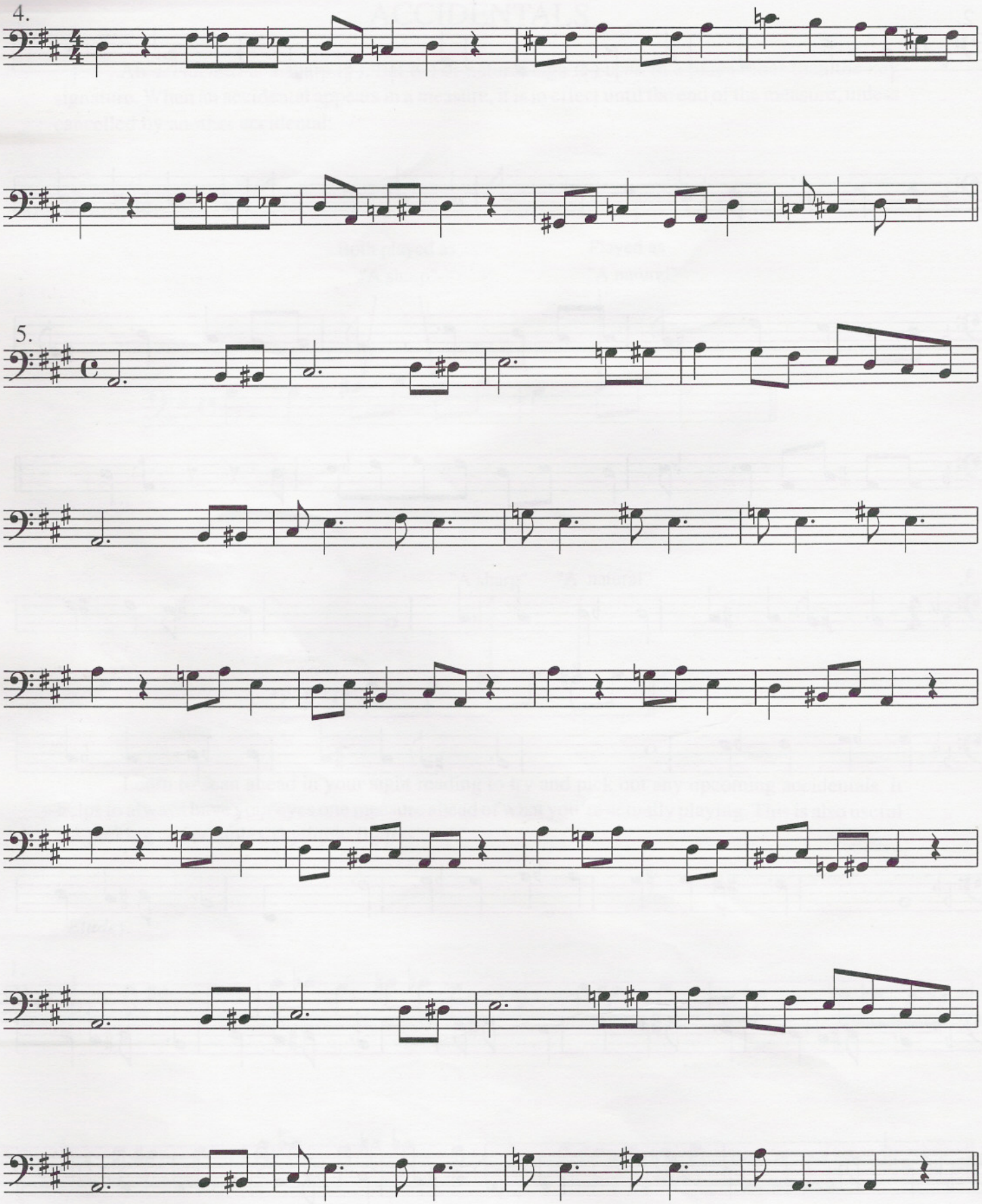


2.

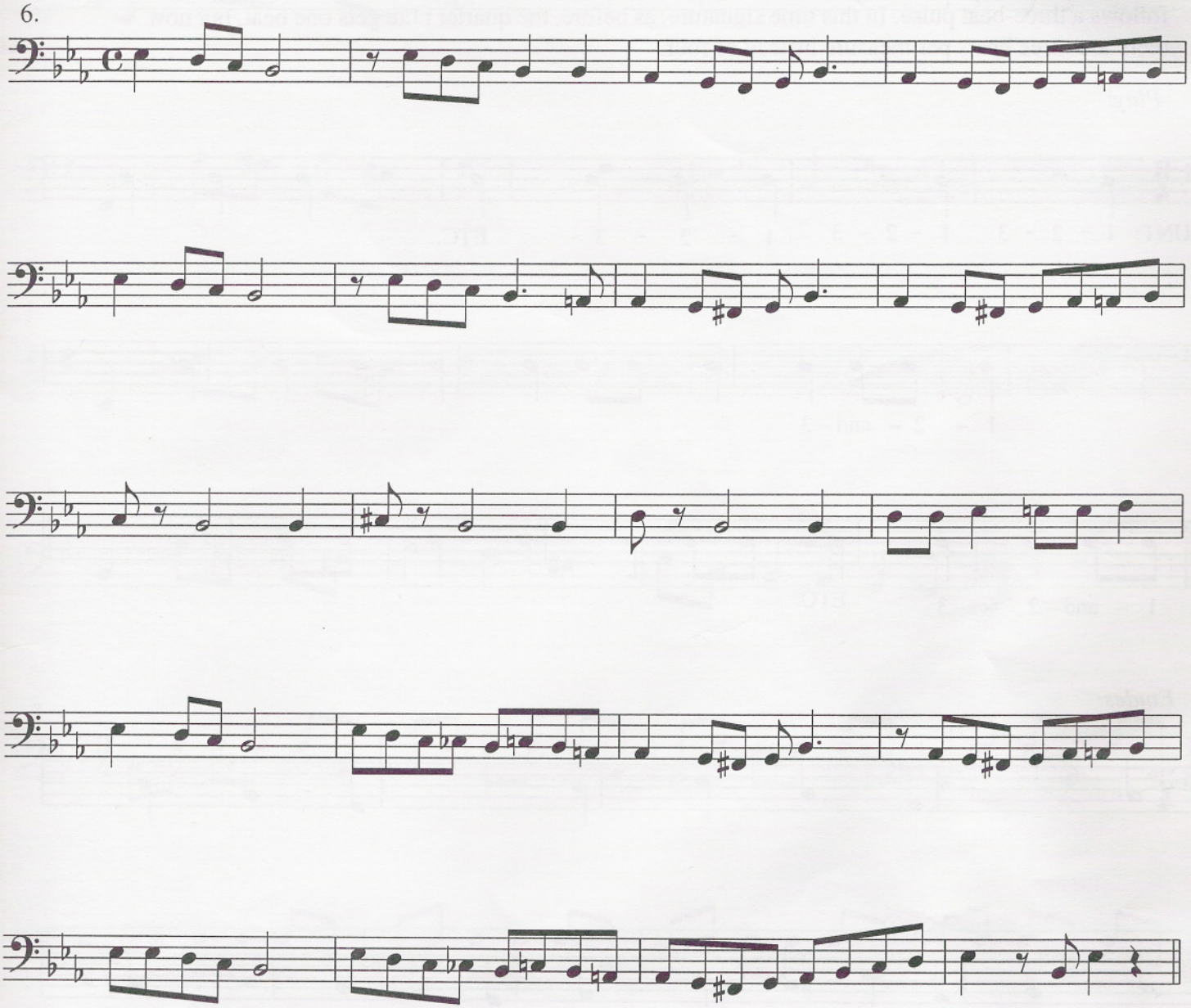


3.




4.
5.

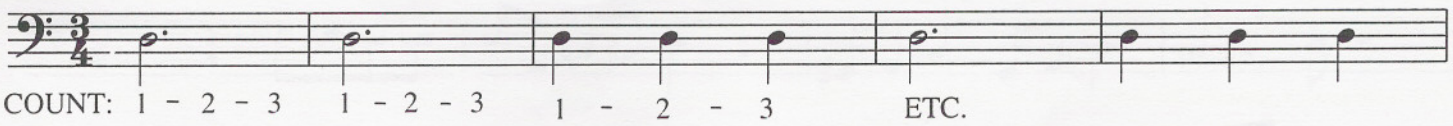
6.

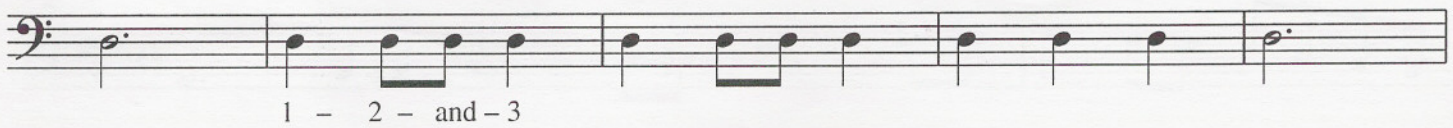


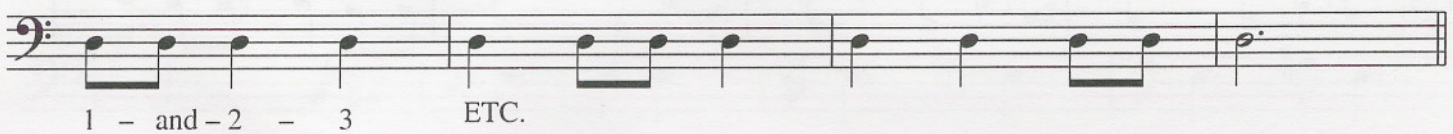
When you scan ahead, also pay attention to whether upcoming groups of notes are scalic (scale-based) or intervalic (jumps).

Here we introduce some different time signatures. The first is 3/4 time, in which the music follows a three-beat pulse. In this time signature, as before, the quarter note gets one beat, but now there are three beats per measure instead of four.

Play:

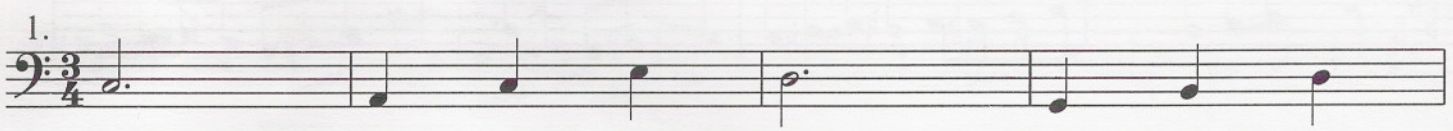


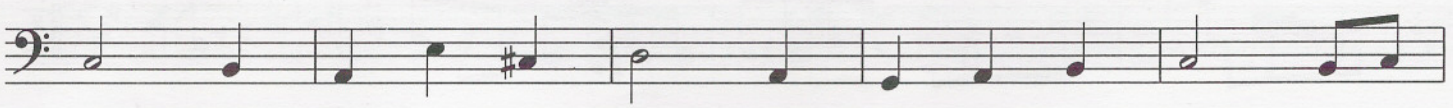


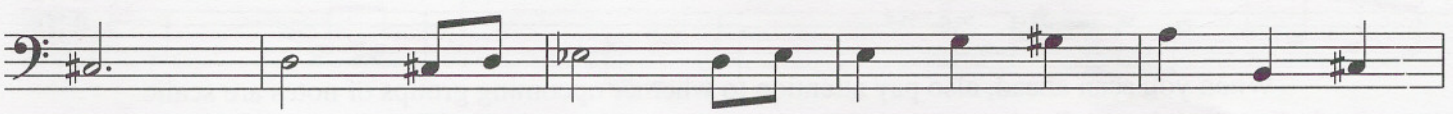


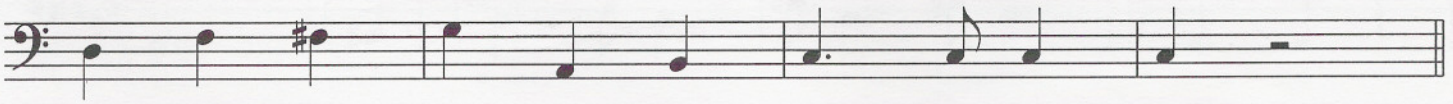
Etudes:

1.

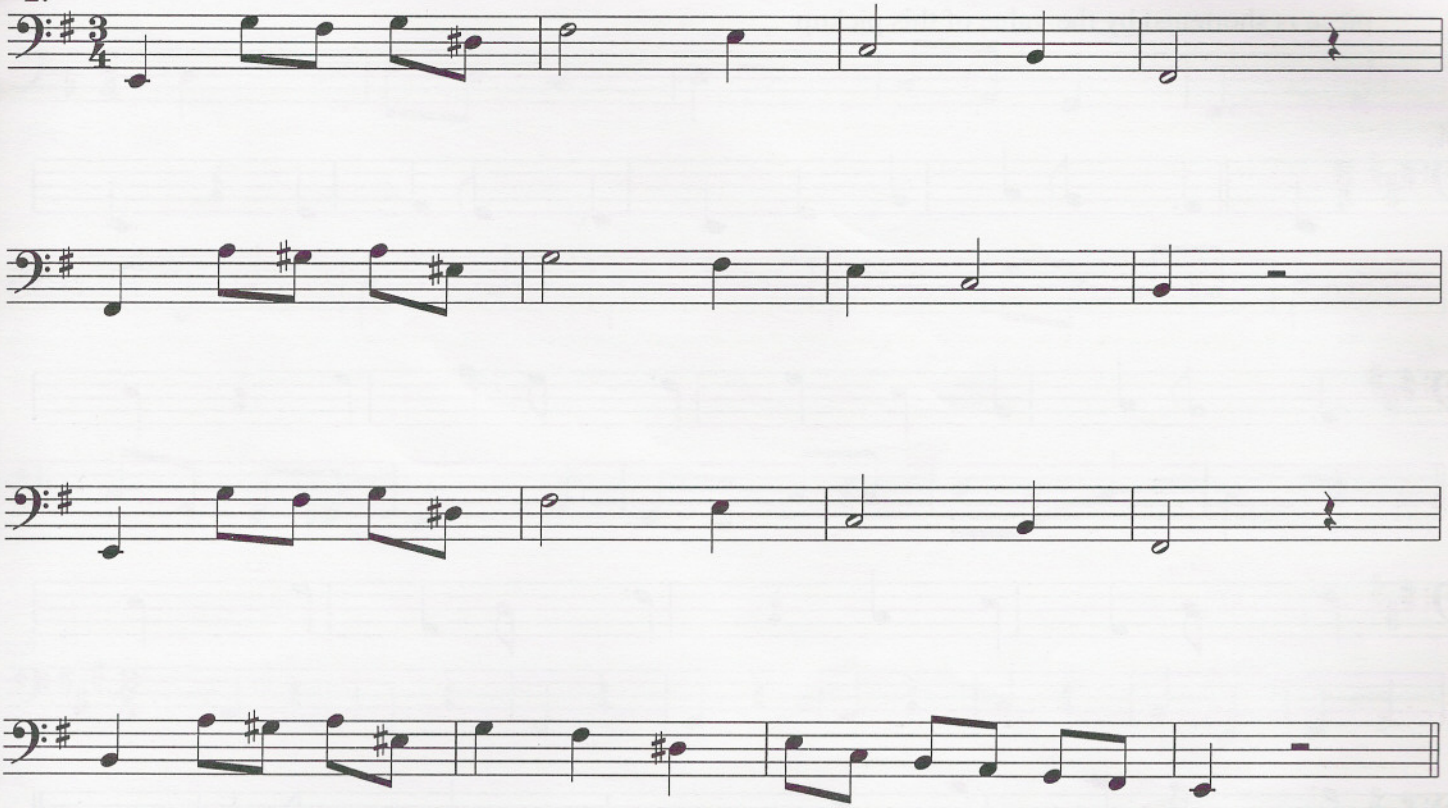




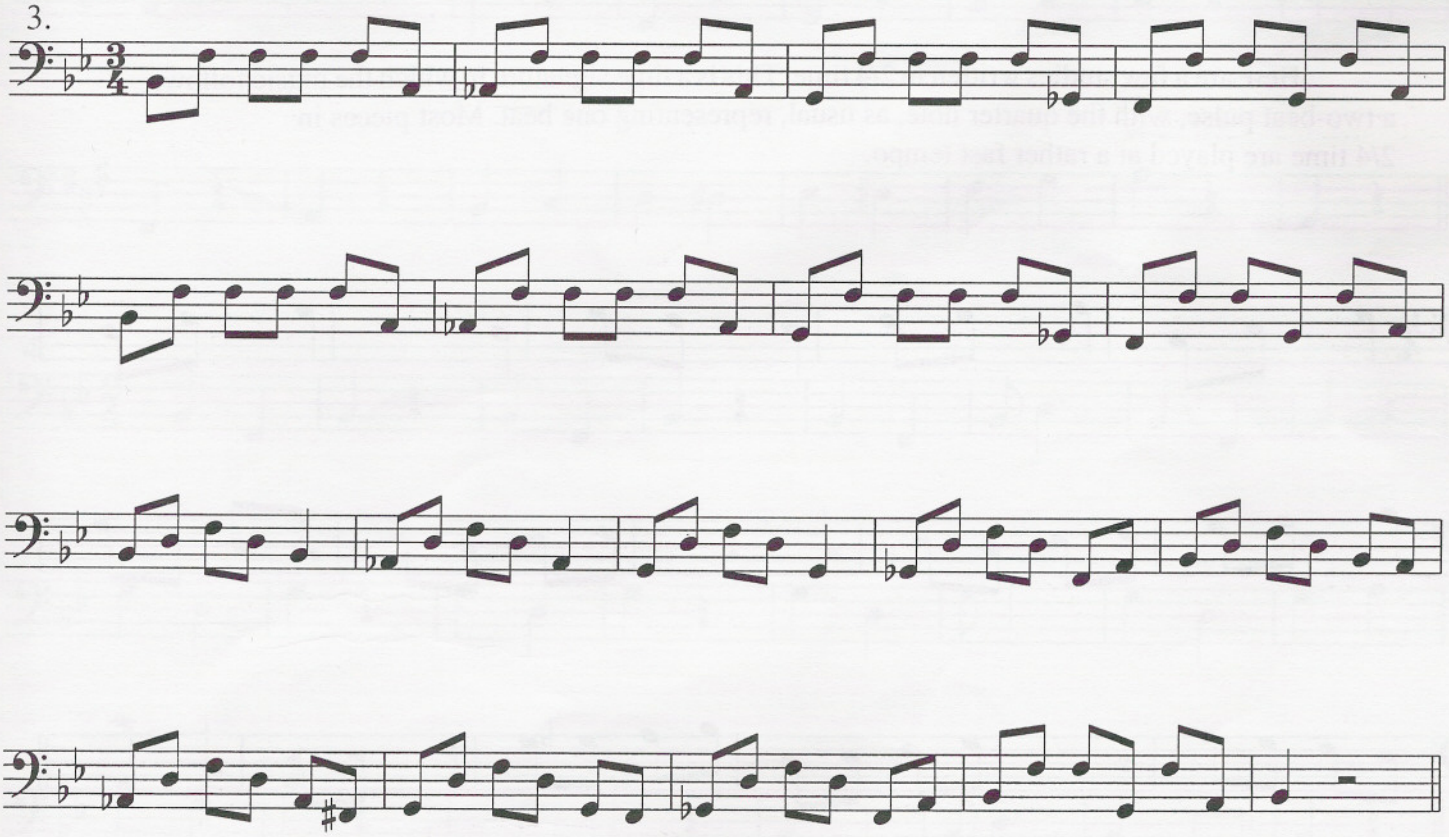




2.

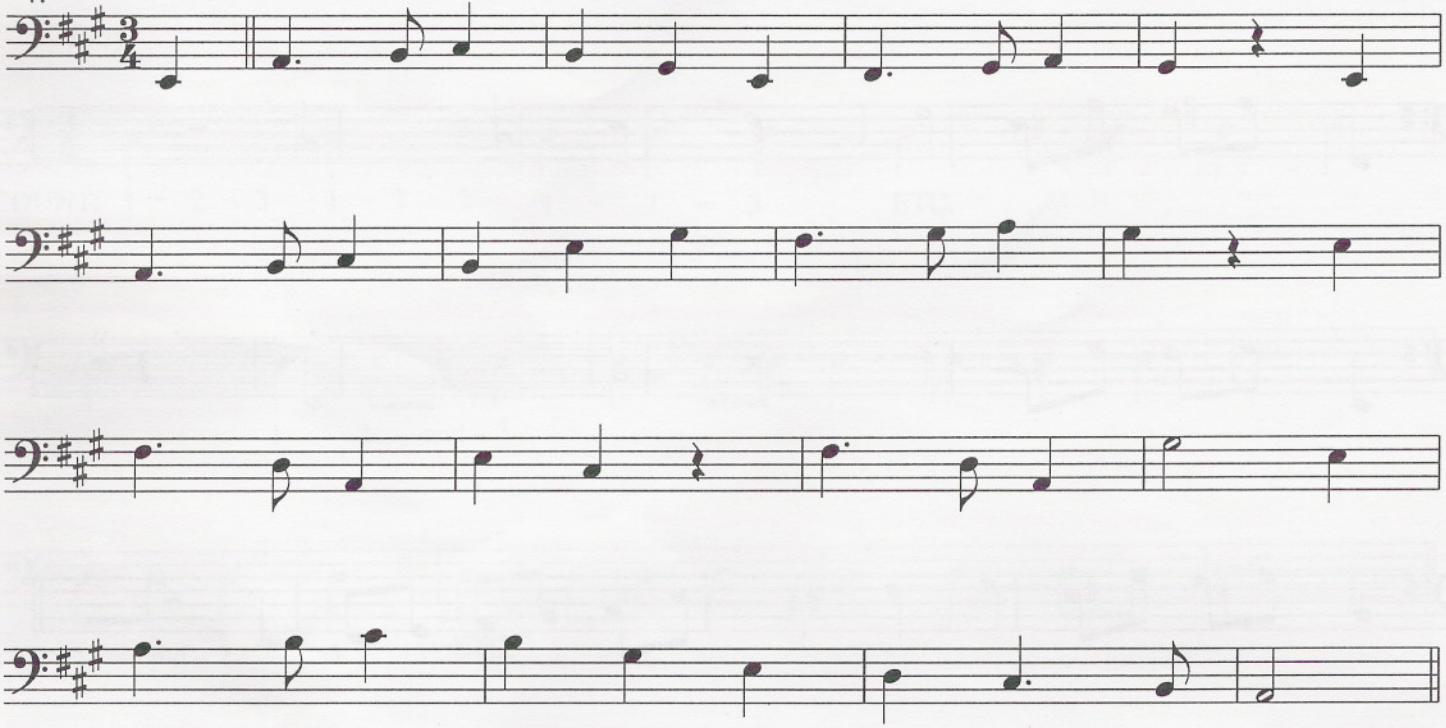


3.



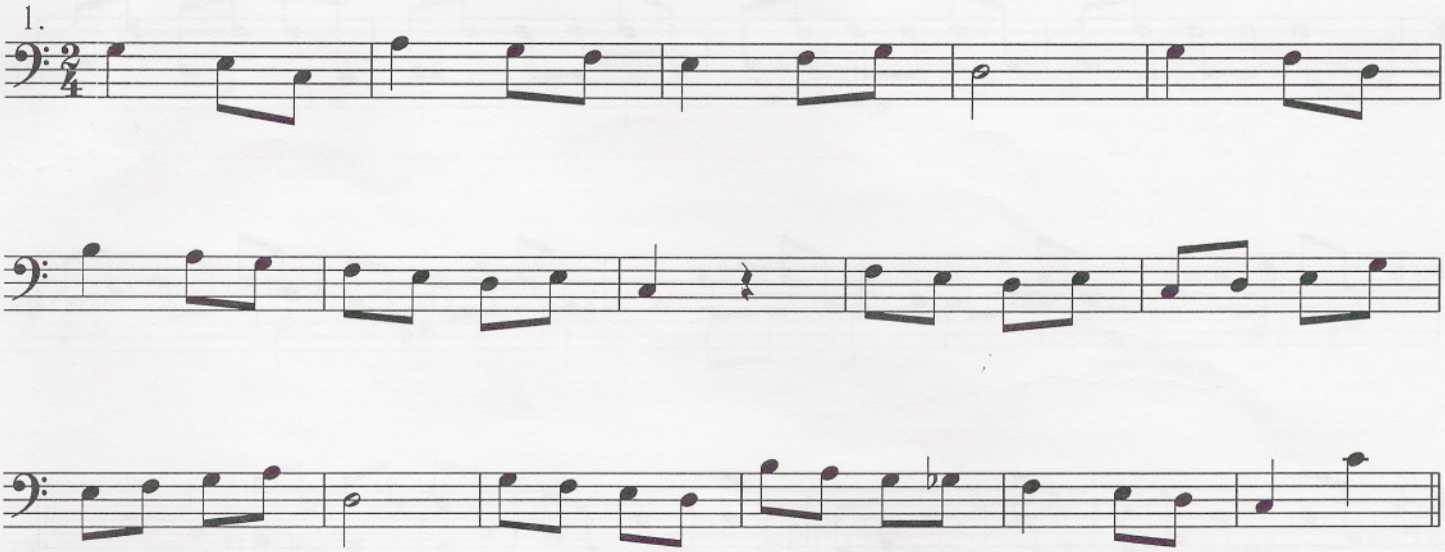
Notice that the next piece begins with a "pickup" note. Traditionally, the last measure of the piece is shortened by the value of this pickup.

4.

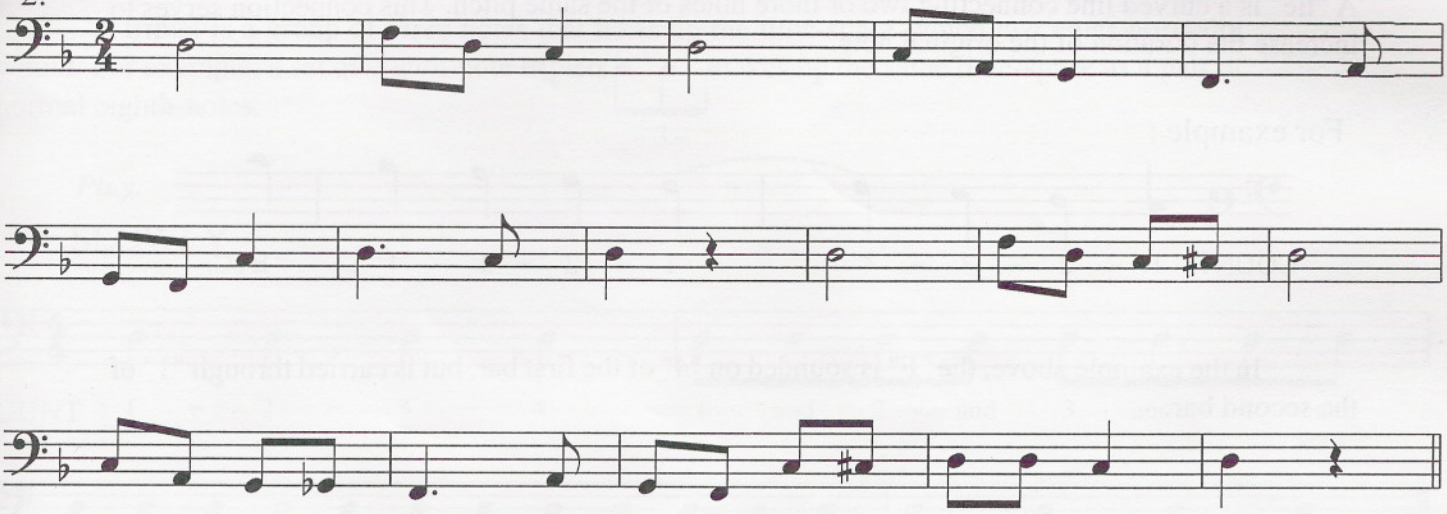


Here are a few studies written in 2/4 time. This is a time signature in which the music follows a two-beat pulse, with the quarter note, as usual, representing one beat. Most pieces in 2/4 time are played at a rather fast tempo.

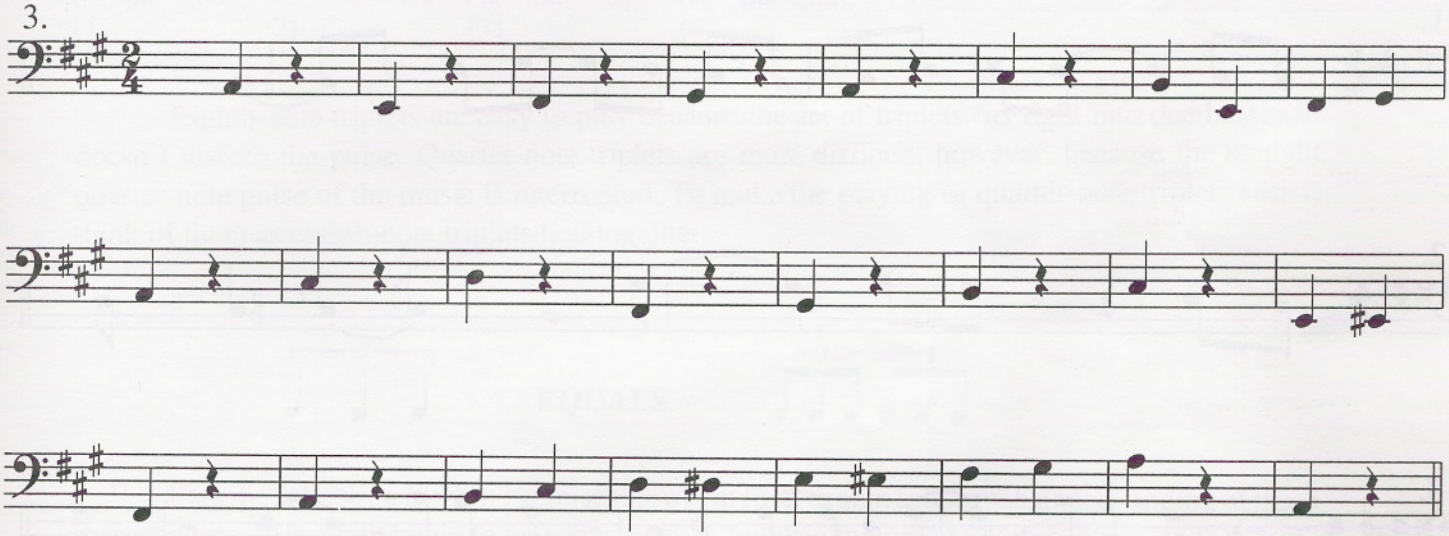
1.



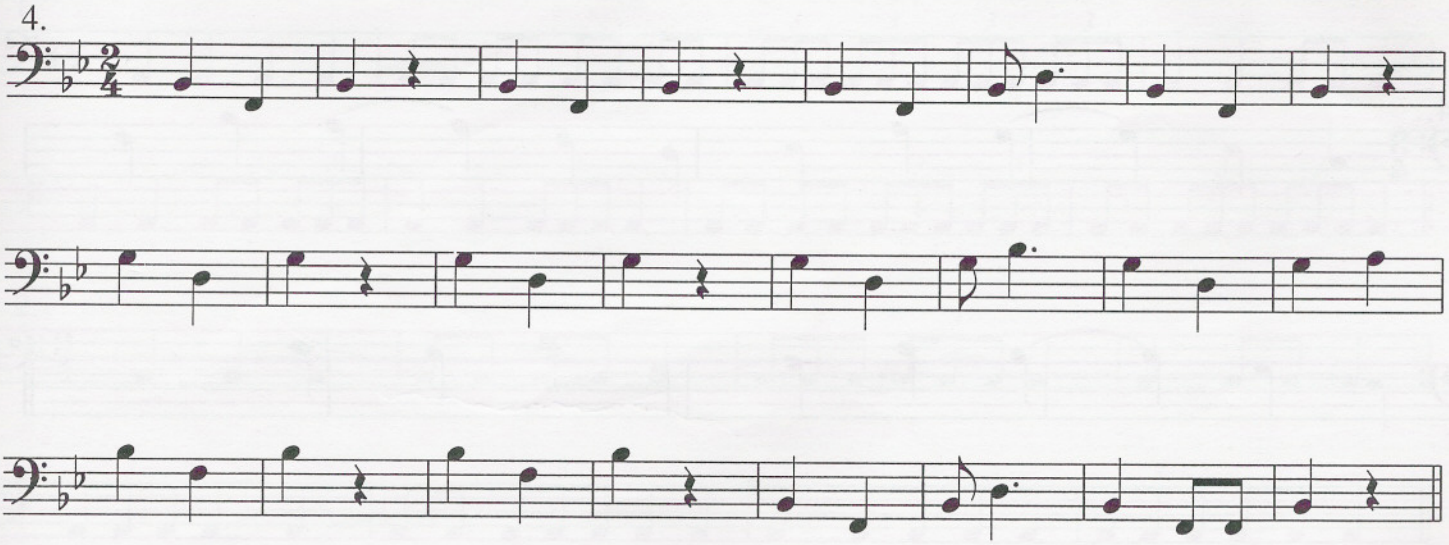
2.



3.



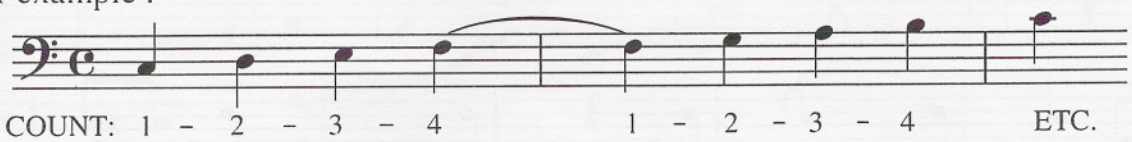
4.



TIES

A "tie" is a curved line connecting two or more notes of the same pitch. This connection serves to increase the duration of the original note.

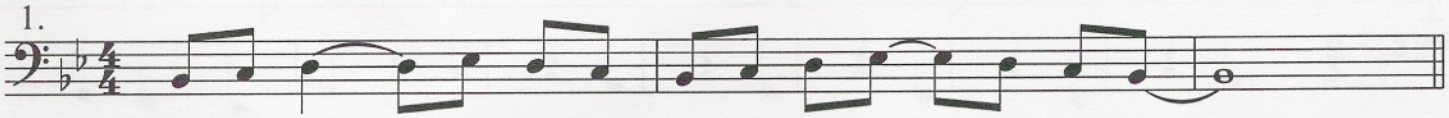
For example :



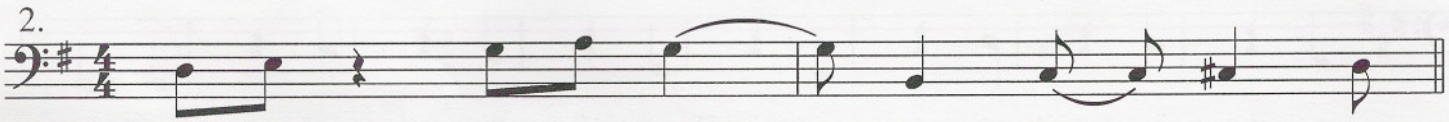
In the example above, the "F" is sounded on "4" of the first bar, but is carried through "1" of the second bar.

Exercises: (use metronome)

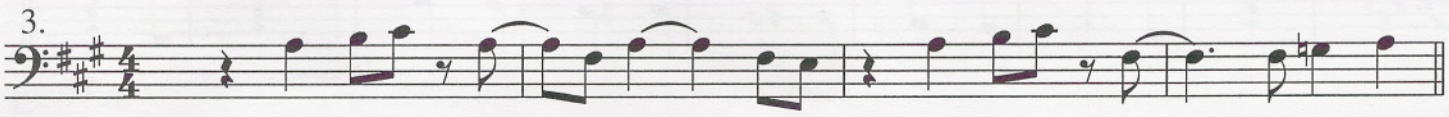
1.



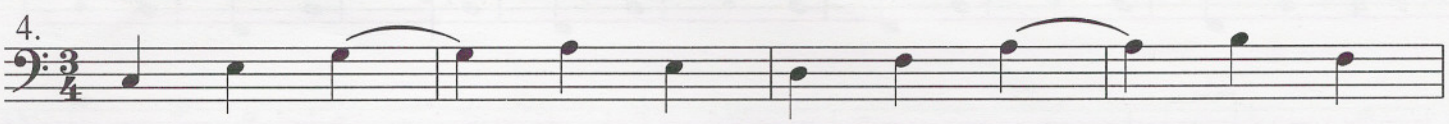
2.

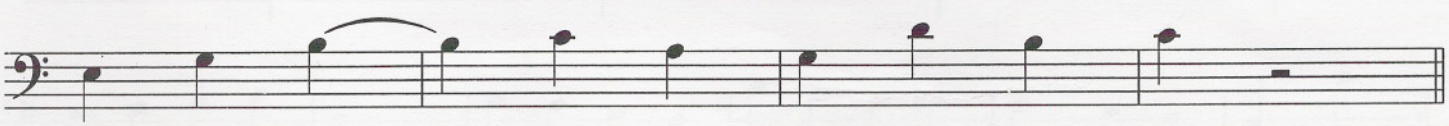


3.



4.





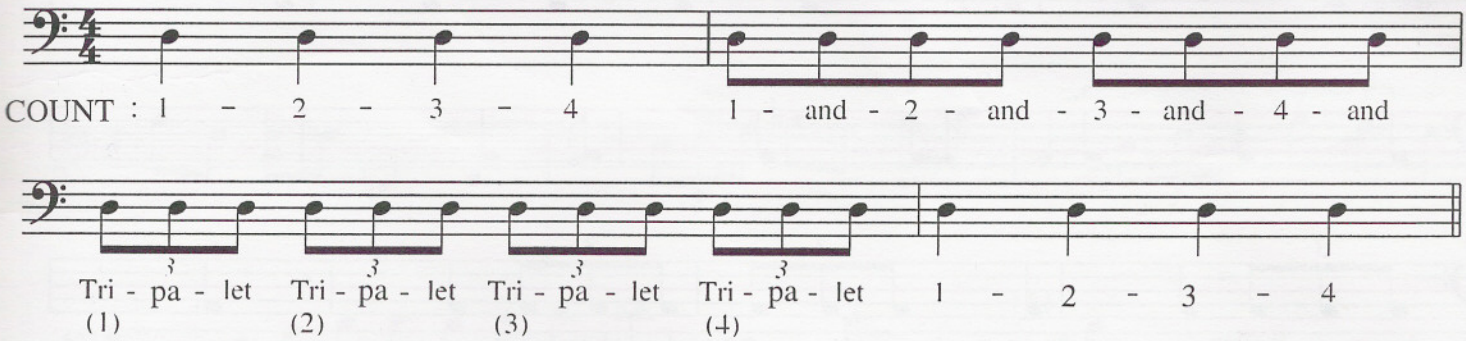
TRIPLETS

A triplet is a group of *three* notes that takes up the time-space which *two* notes normally would. For example, a set of eighth-note triplets

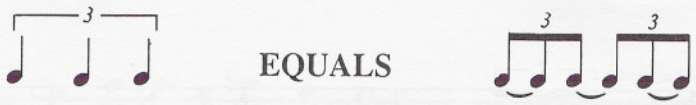
takes up the same time-space as a pair of normal eighth-notes.

Play:

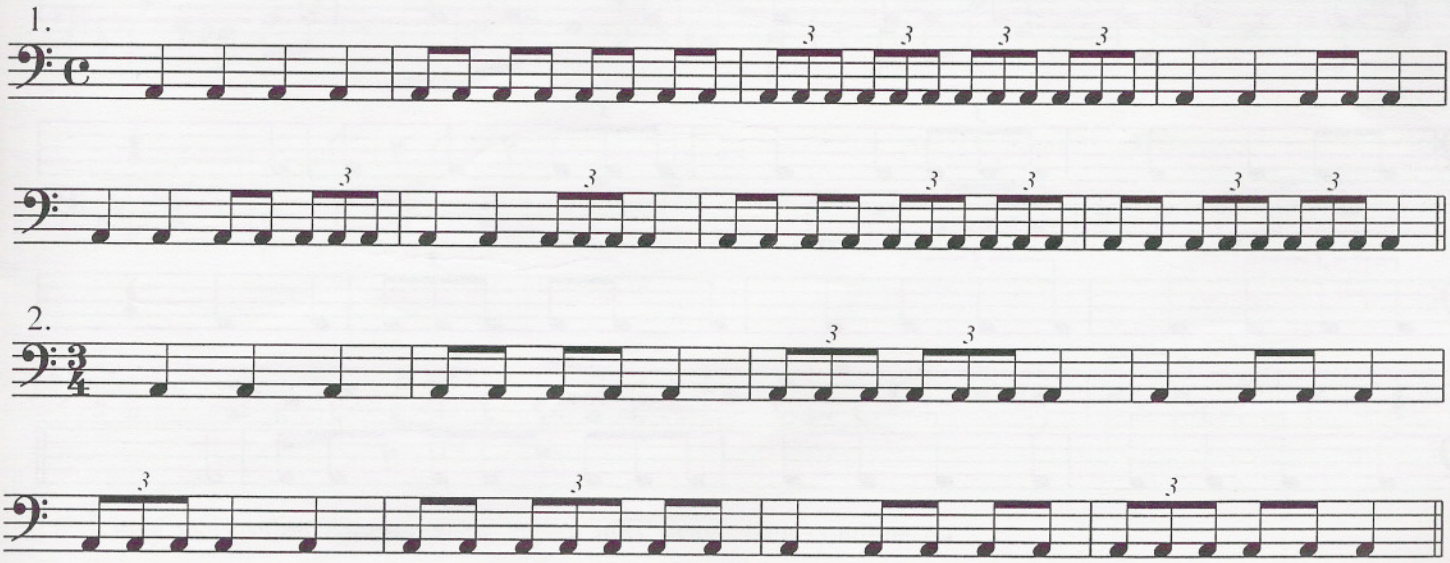
SLOWLY

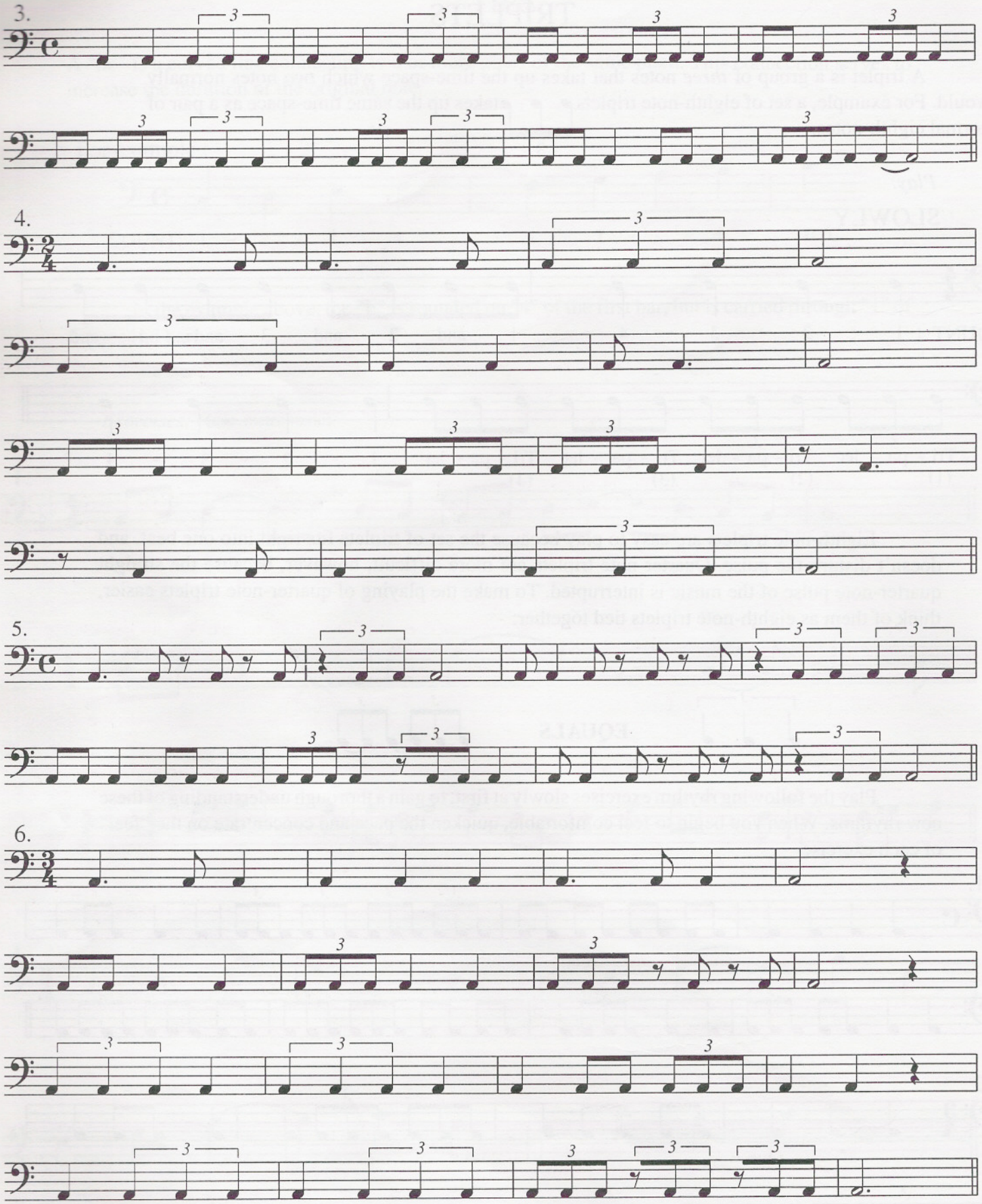


Eighth-note triplets are easy to play because the set of triplets fits right into one beat, and doesn't disturb the pulse. Quarter-note triplets are more difficult, however, because the straight quarter-note pulse of the music is interrupted. To make the playing of quarter-note triplets easier, think of them as eighth-note triplets tied together:



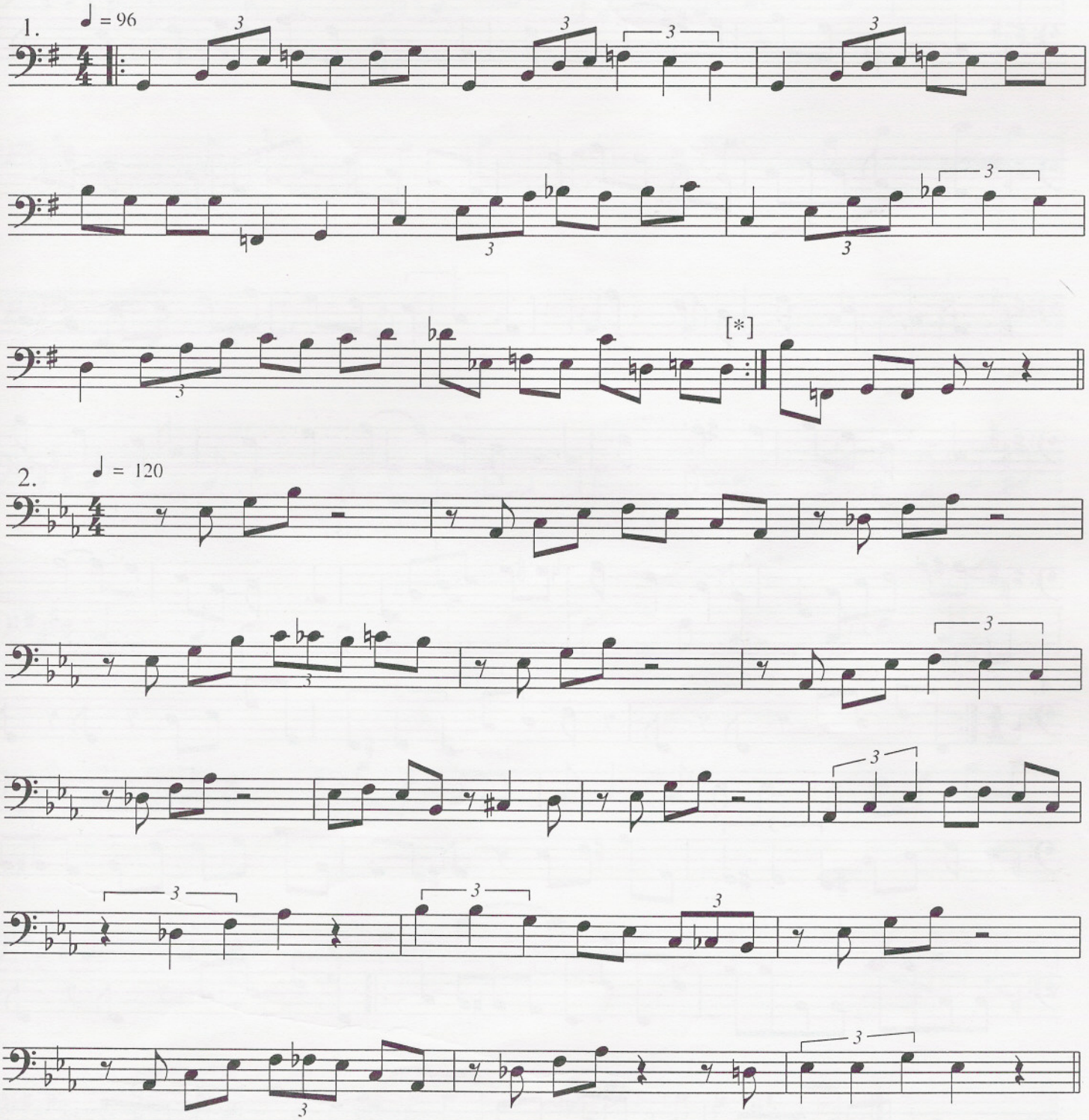
Play the following rhythm exercises slowly at first, to gain a thorough understanding of these new rhythms. When you begin to feel comfortable, quicken the pace and concentrate on the "feel" of each exercise.



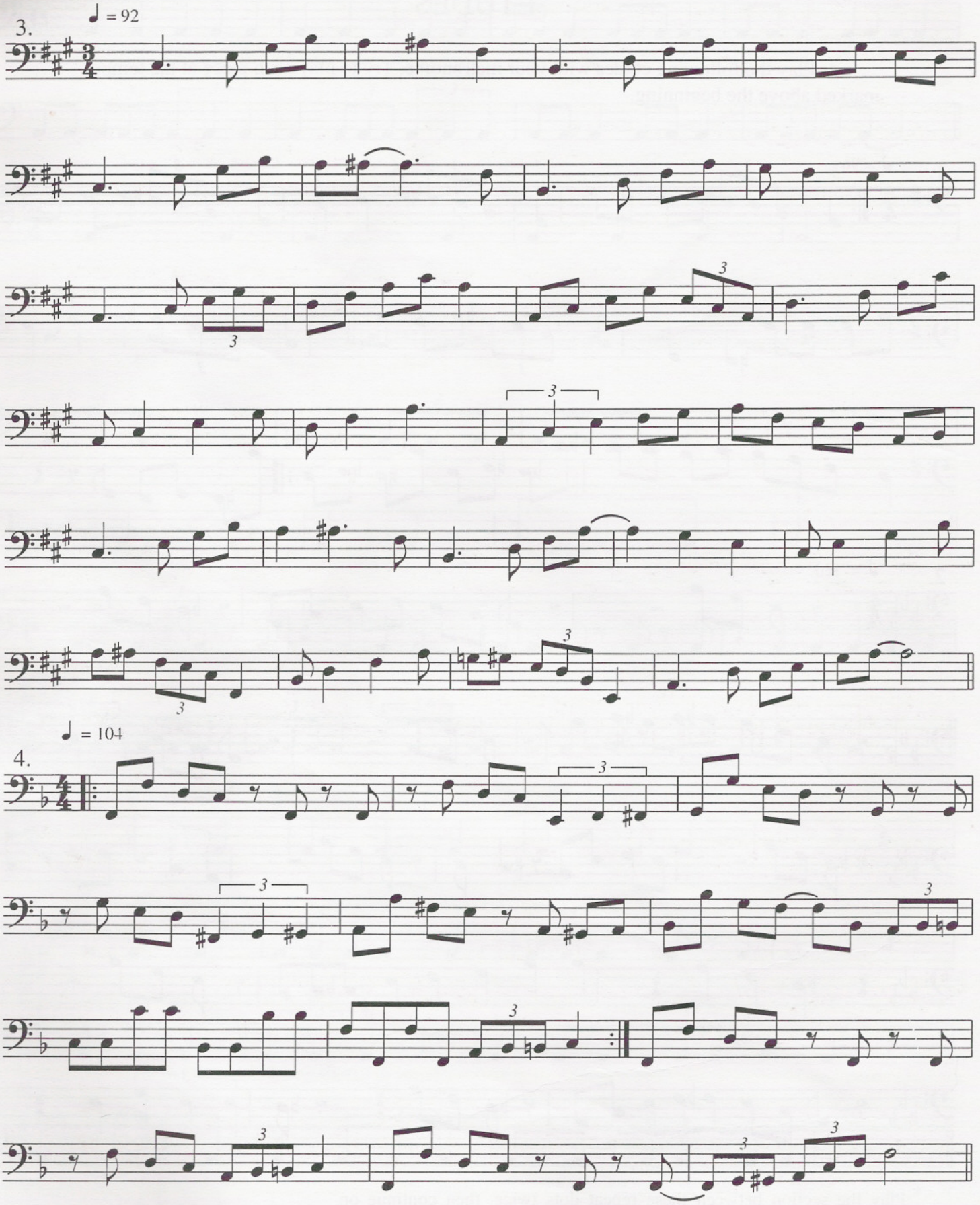

3.
4.
5.
6.

ETUDES

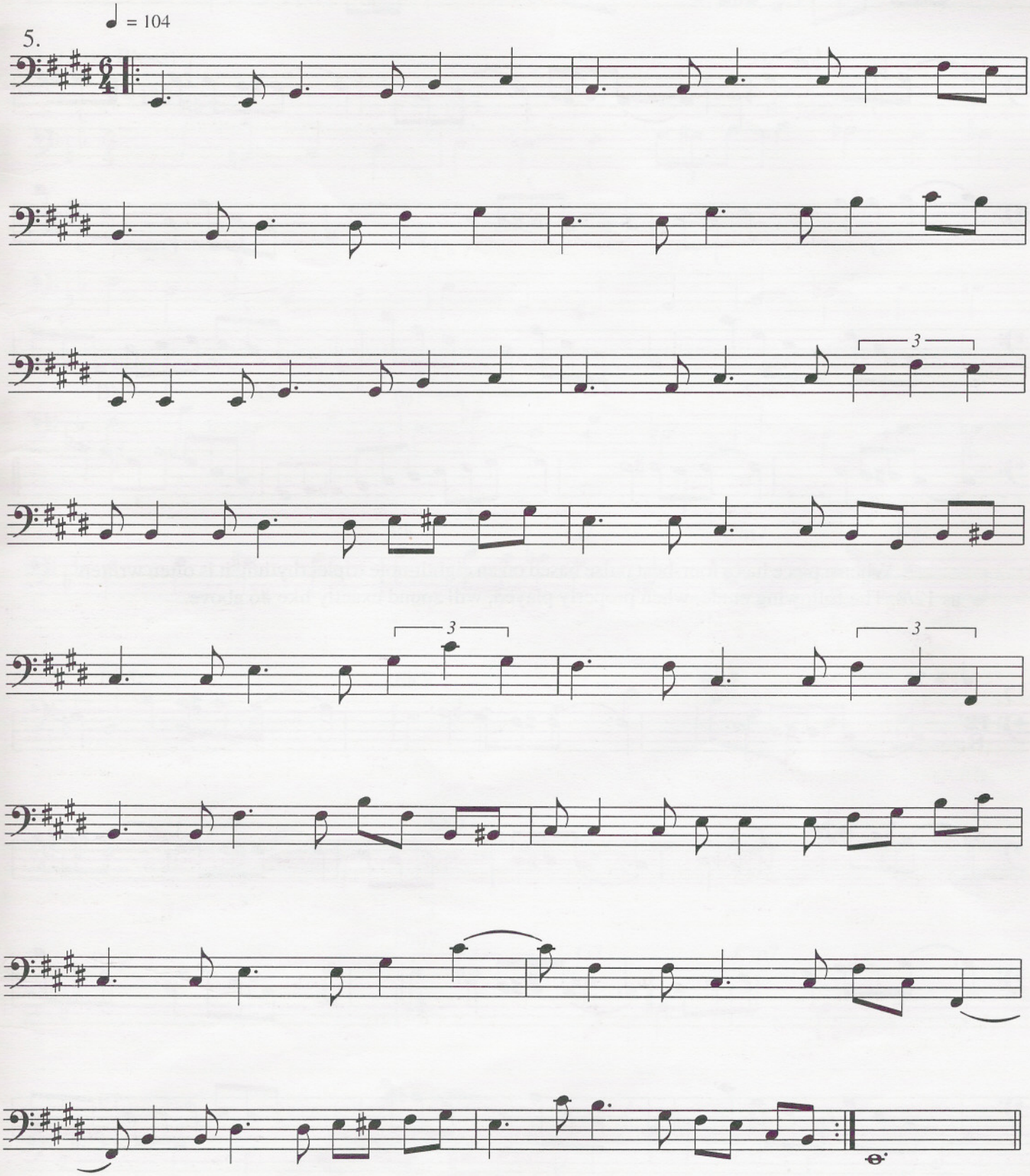
Play the following etudes with your metronome. Try to play each piece at the tempo marked above the beginning.

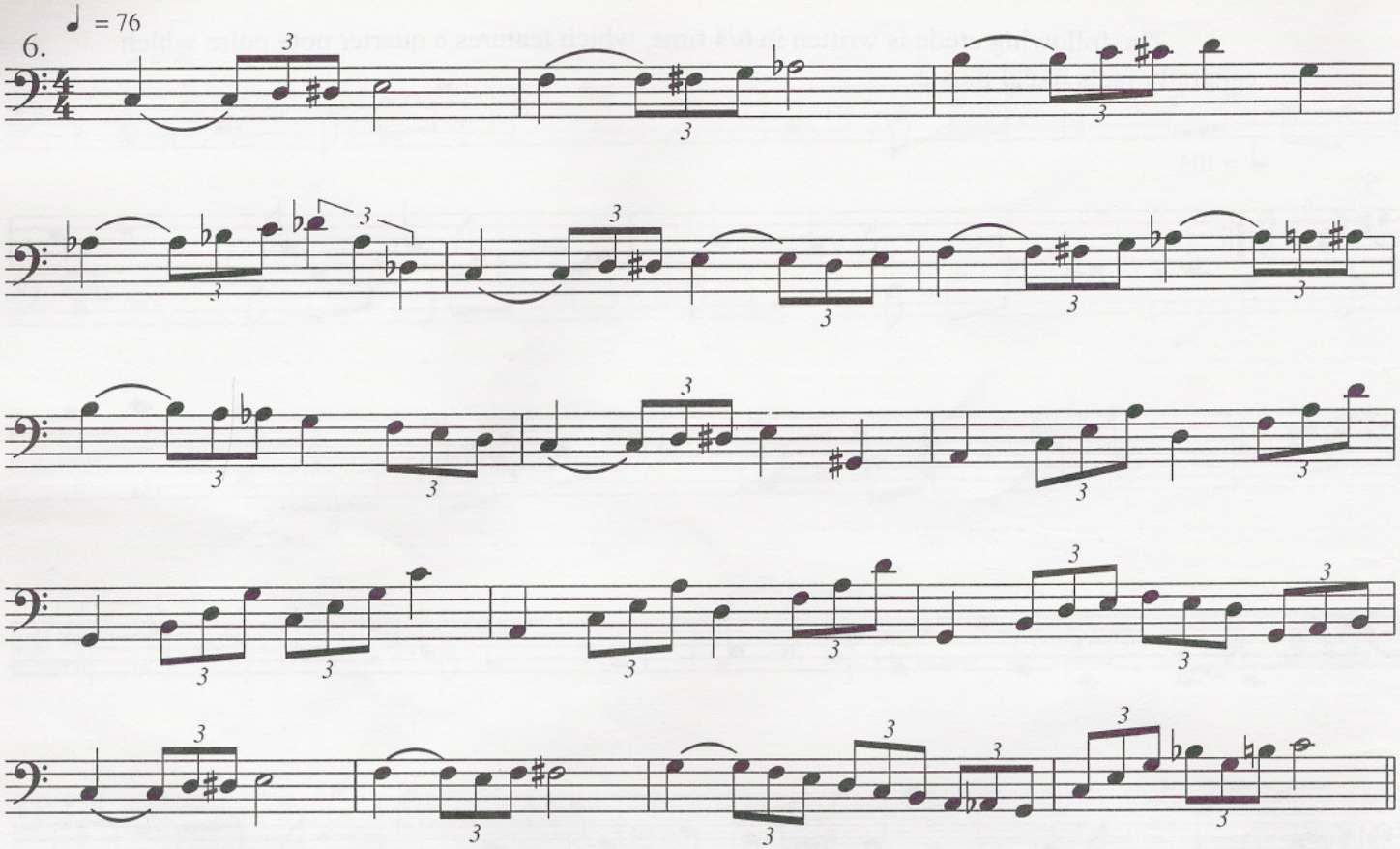


* Play the section between these repeat dots twice, then continue on.

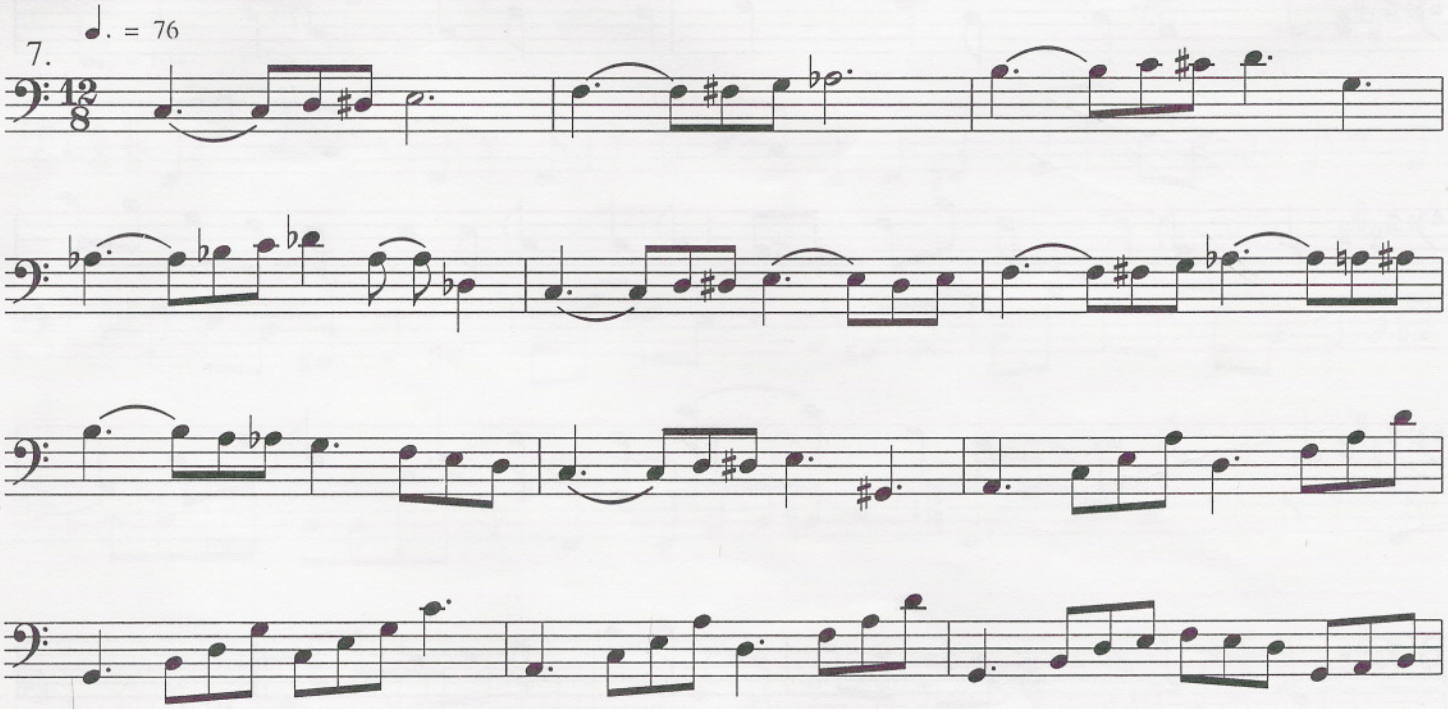

3.
♩ = 92
3
3
3
3
3
♩ = 104
4.
3
3
3
3
3

The following etude is written in 6/4 time, which features a quarter note pulse which generally feels like 4 plus 2.

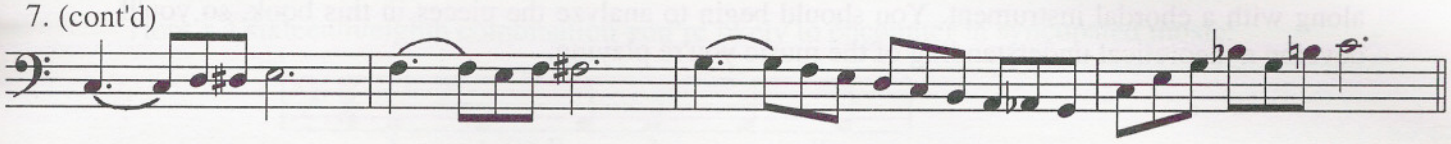




When a piece has a four-beat pulse based on an eighth-note triplet rhythm, it is often written as 12/8. The following etude, when properly played, will sound exactly like #6 above.

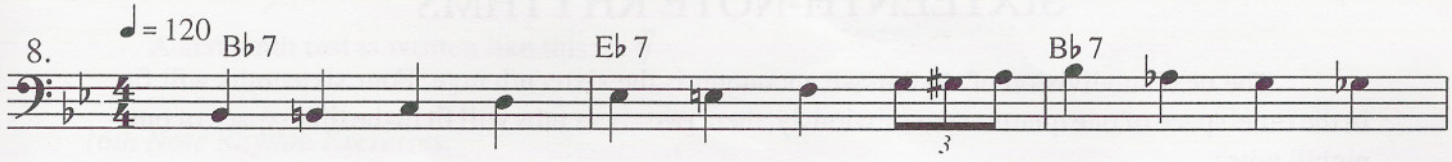


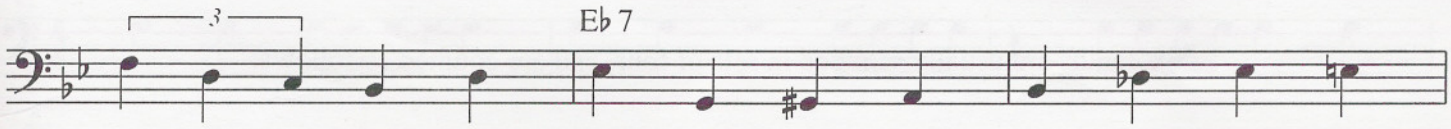
7. (cont'd)

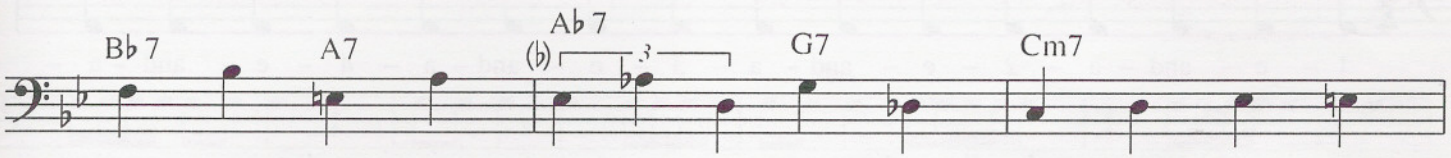


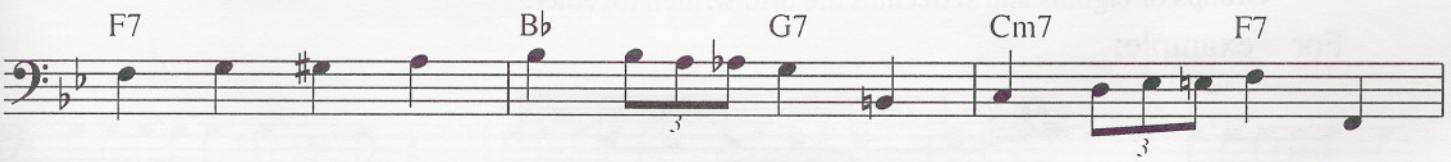
(Jazz Blues)

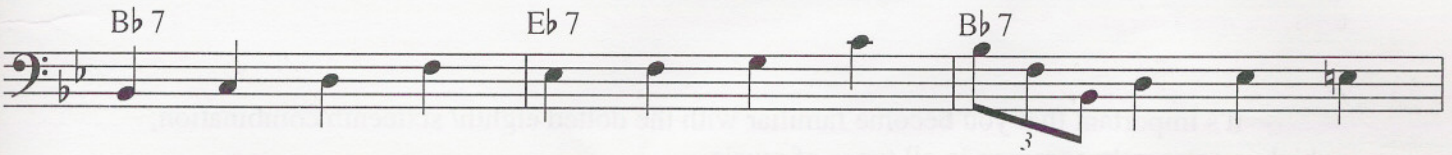
8. ♩ = 120

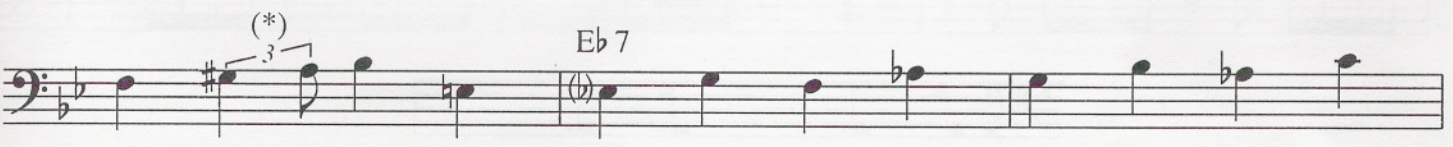


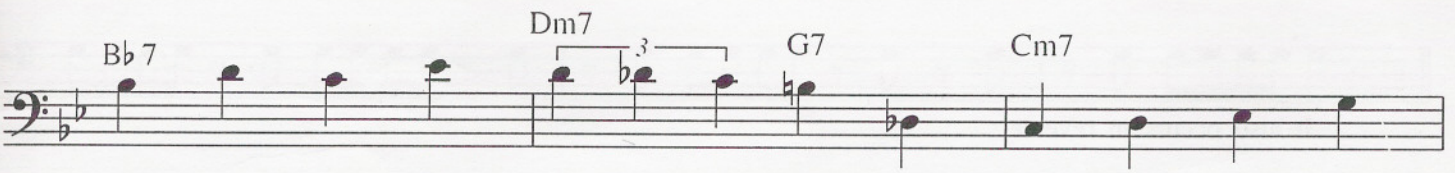


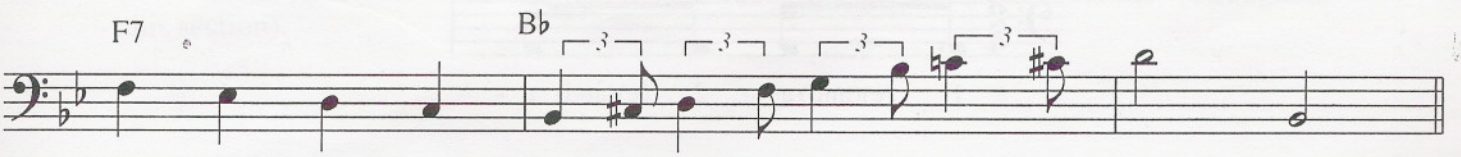


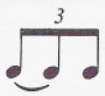










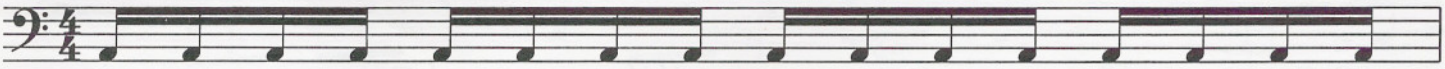
* Sounds like 

Chord symbols have been added to the previous etude so that you might experiment playing along with a chordal instrument. You should begin to analyze the pieces in this book, so you'll develop a theoretical understanding of the music you're playing.

SIXTEENTH-NOTE RHYTHMS

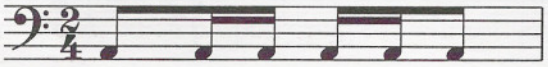
The next subdivision of rhythm we encounter is the sixteenth note. Four sixteenths will fit in the time-space of one quarter note (obviously, then, two sixteenths will fit in the time-space of one eighth note).

Sixteenths are usually grouped in sets of four, and are counted as follows:

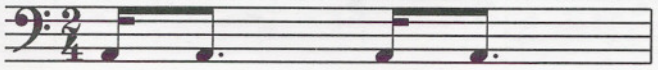


Groups of eighths and sixteenths are also written together.

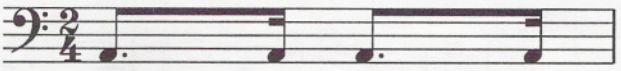
For example:



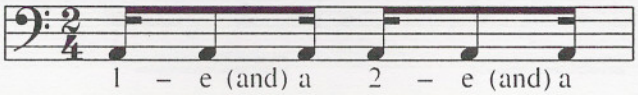
It's important that you become familiar with the dotted eighth/ sixteenth combination, which is extremely common in all types of music.



It also occurs in reverse:



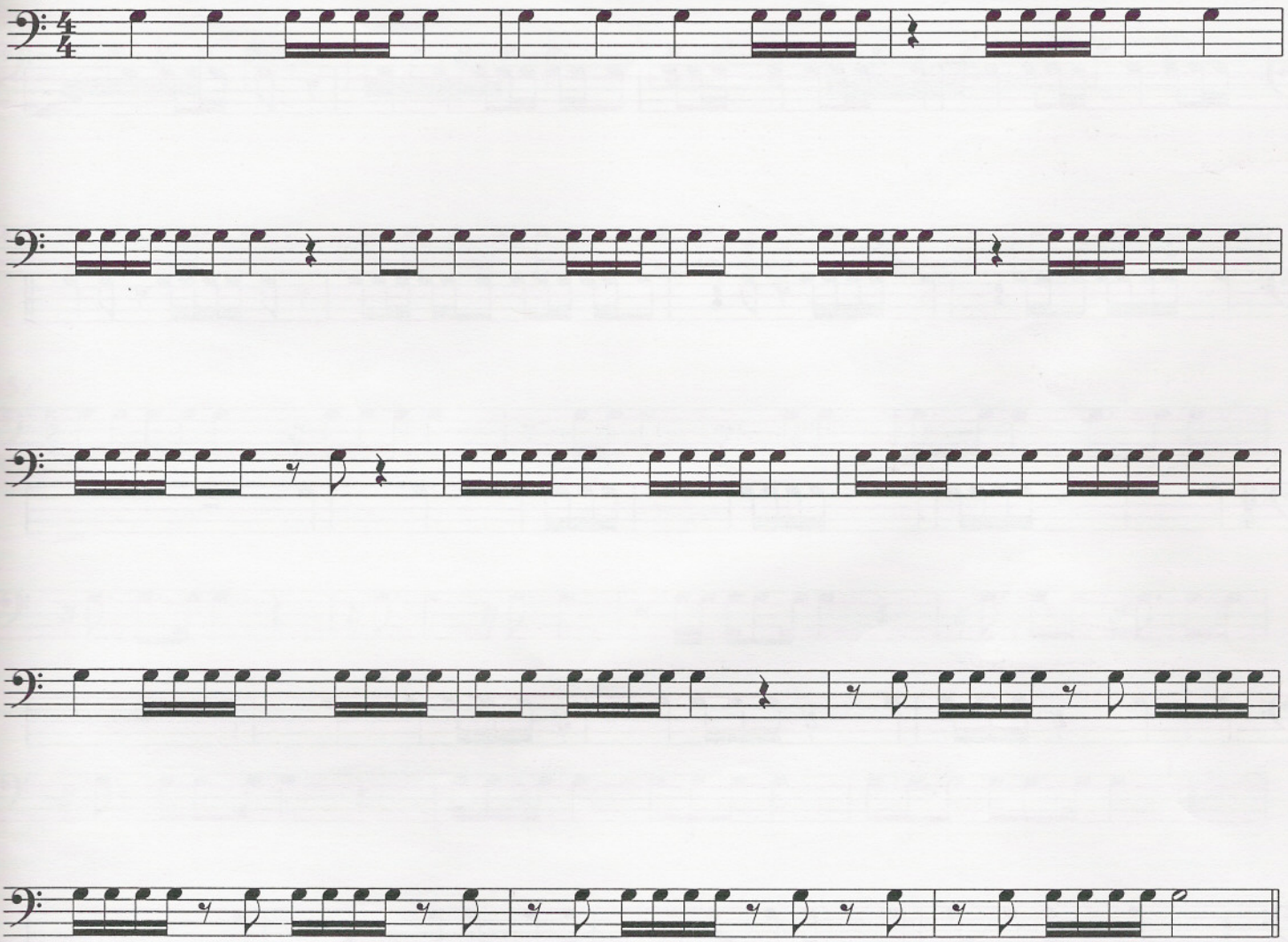
Here's a sixteenth/eighth combination you're likely to encounter in syncopated music:



A sixteenth rest is written like this: 𝅀

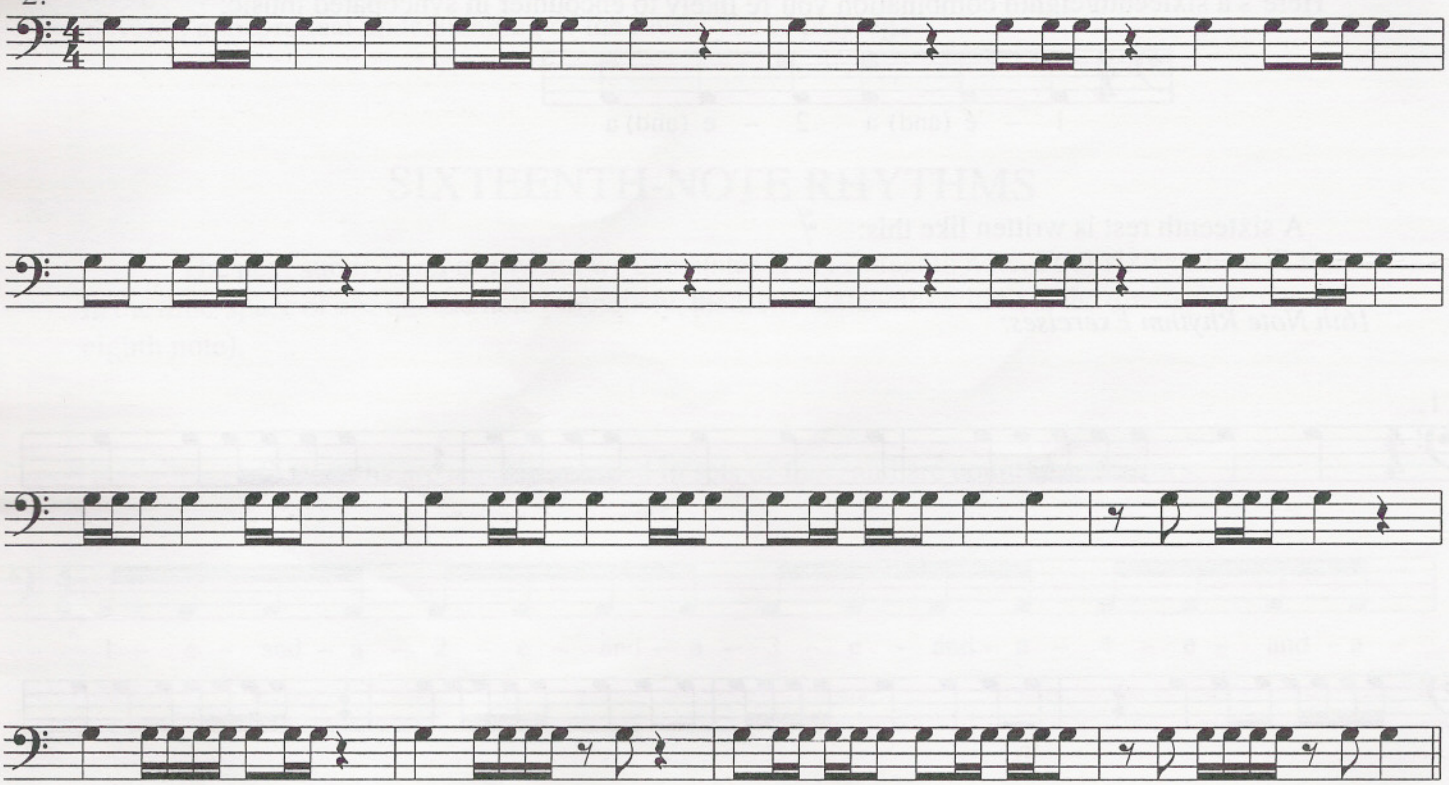
16th Note Rhythm Exercises:

1.

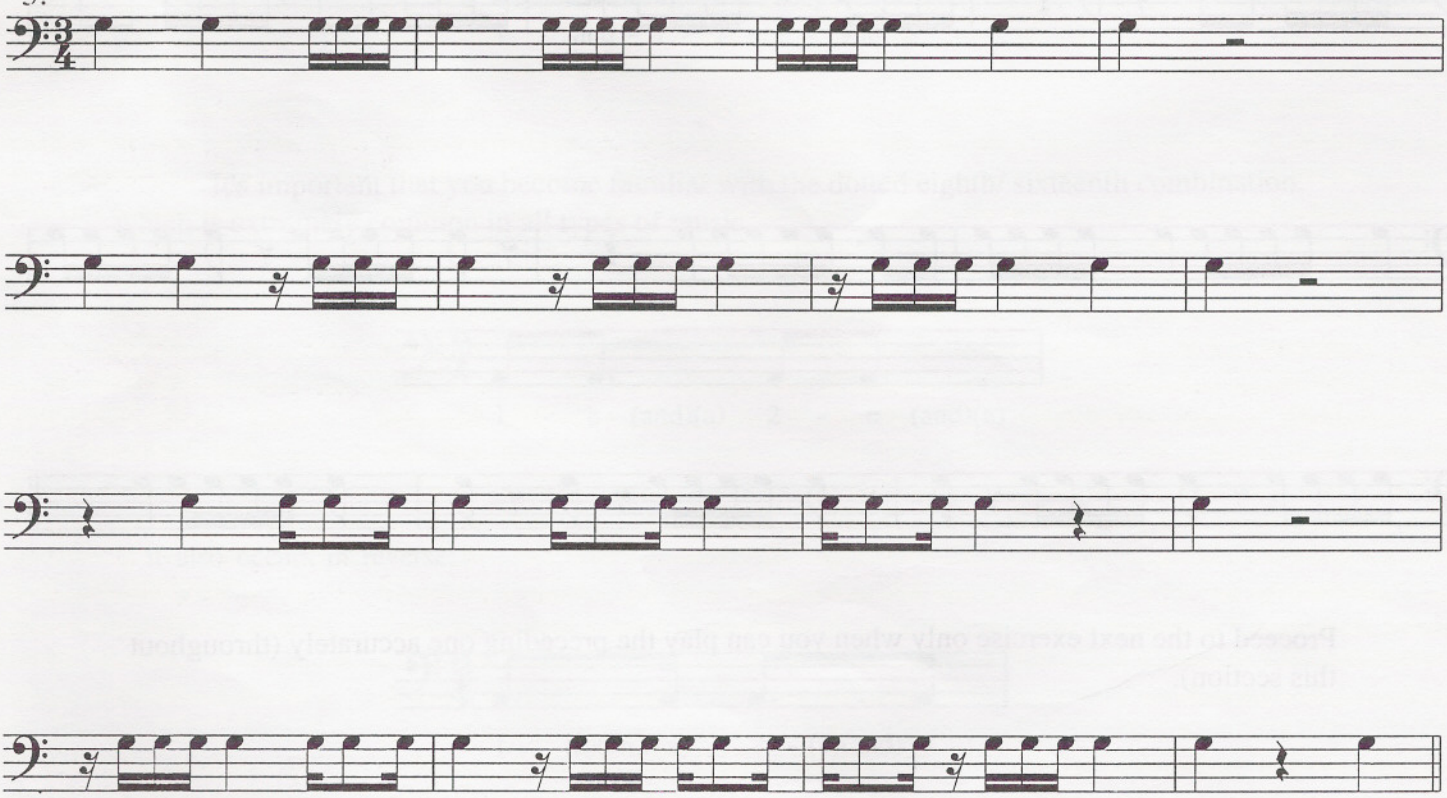


Proceed to the next exercise only when you can play the preceding one accurately (throughout this section).

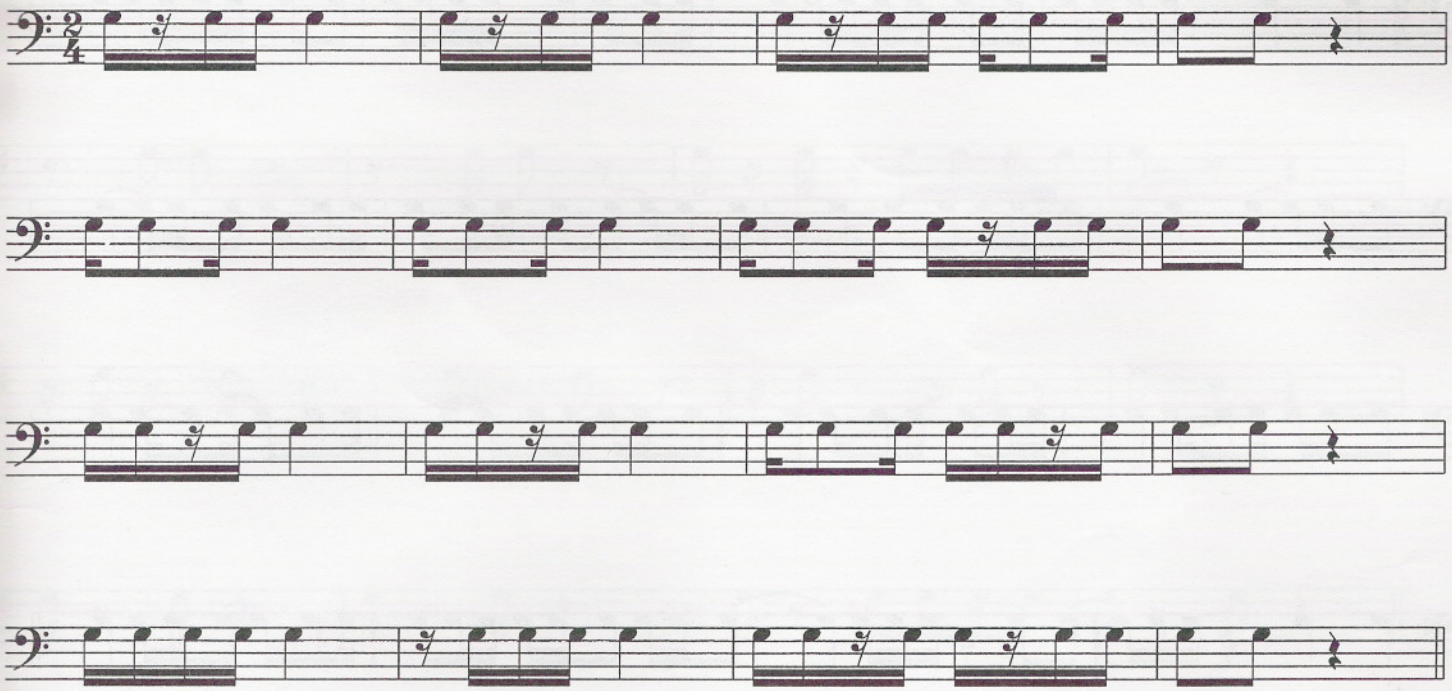
2.



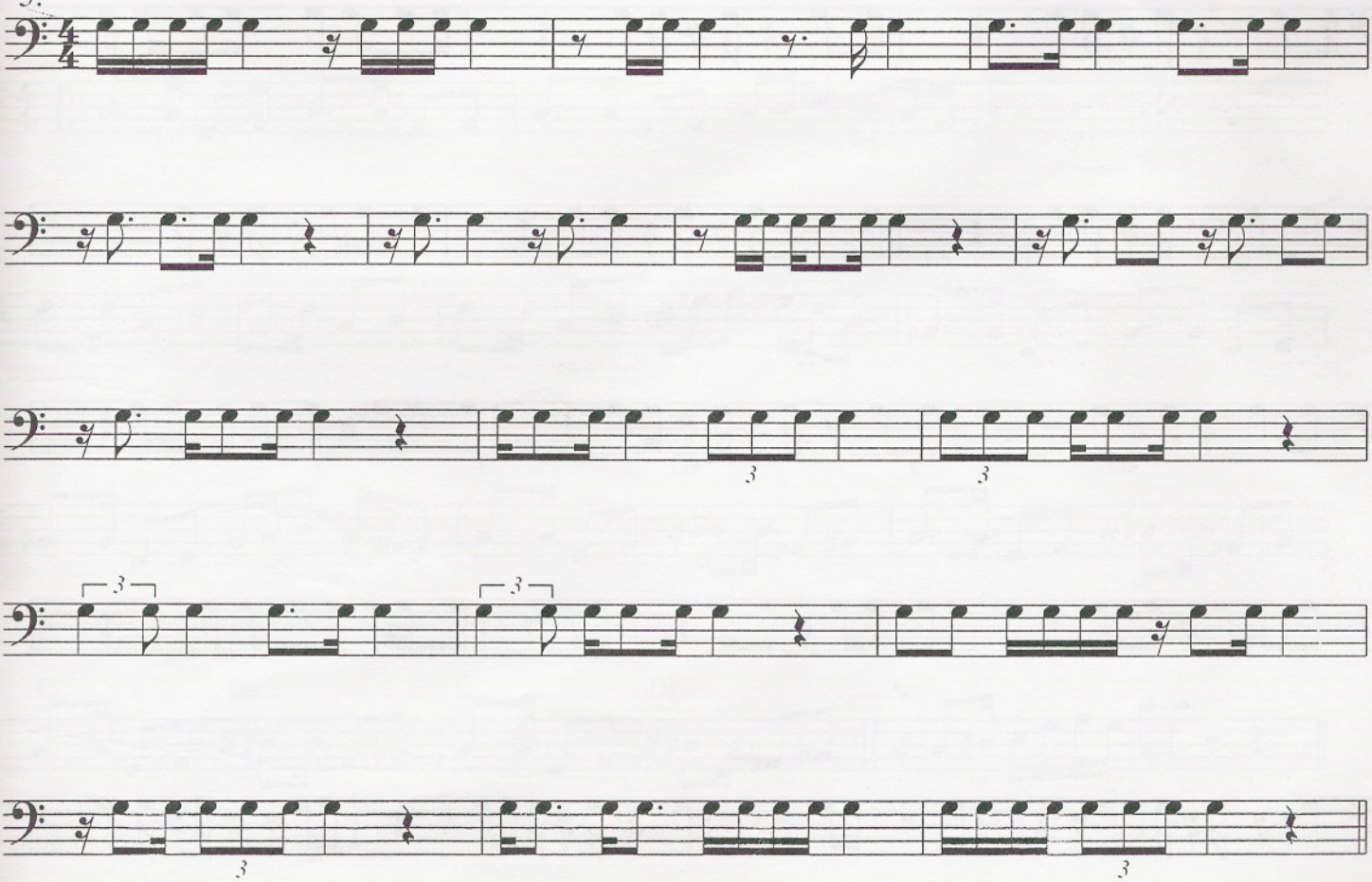
3.



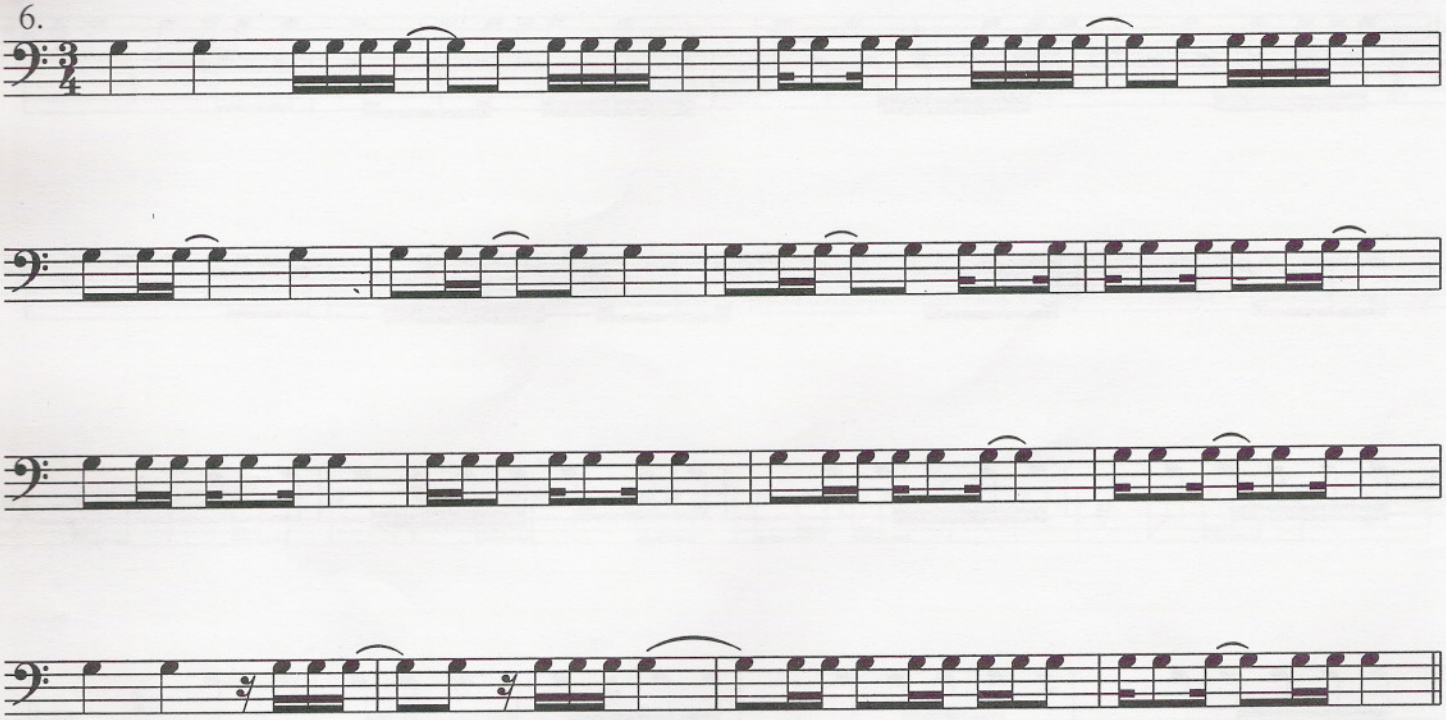
4.



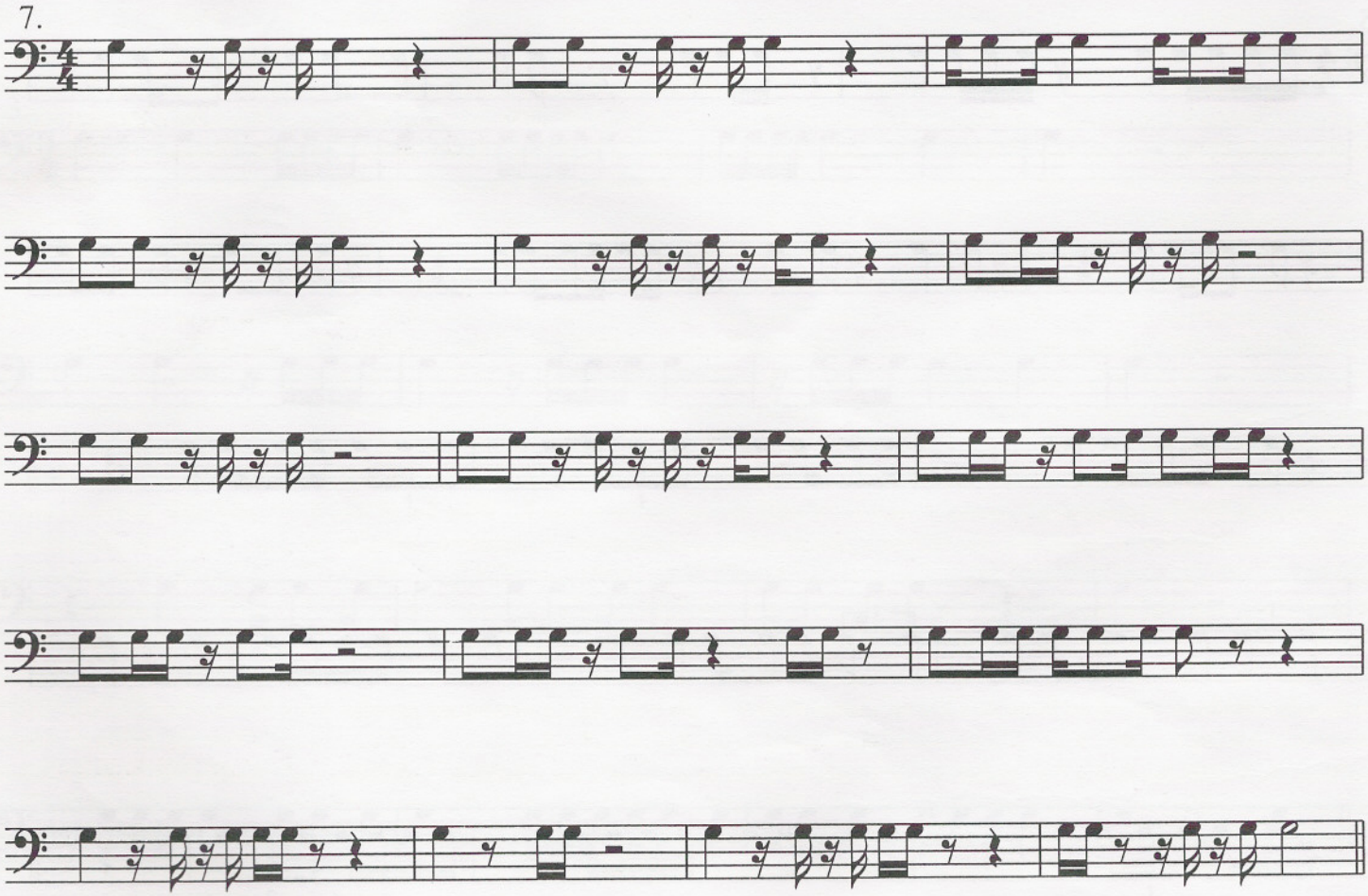
5.



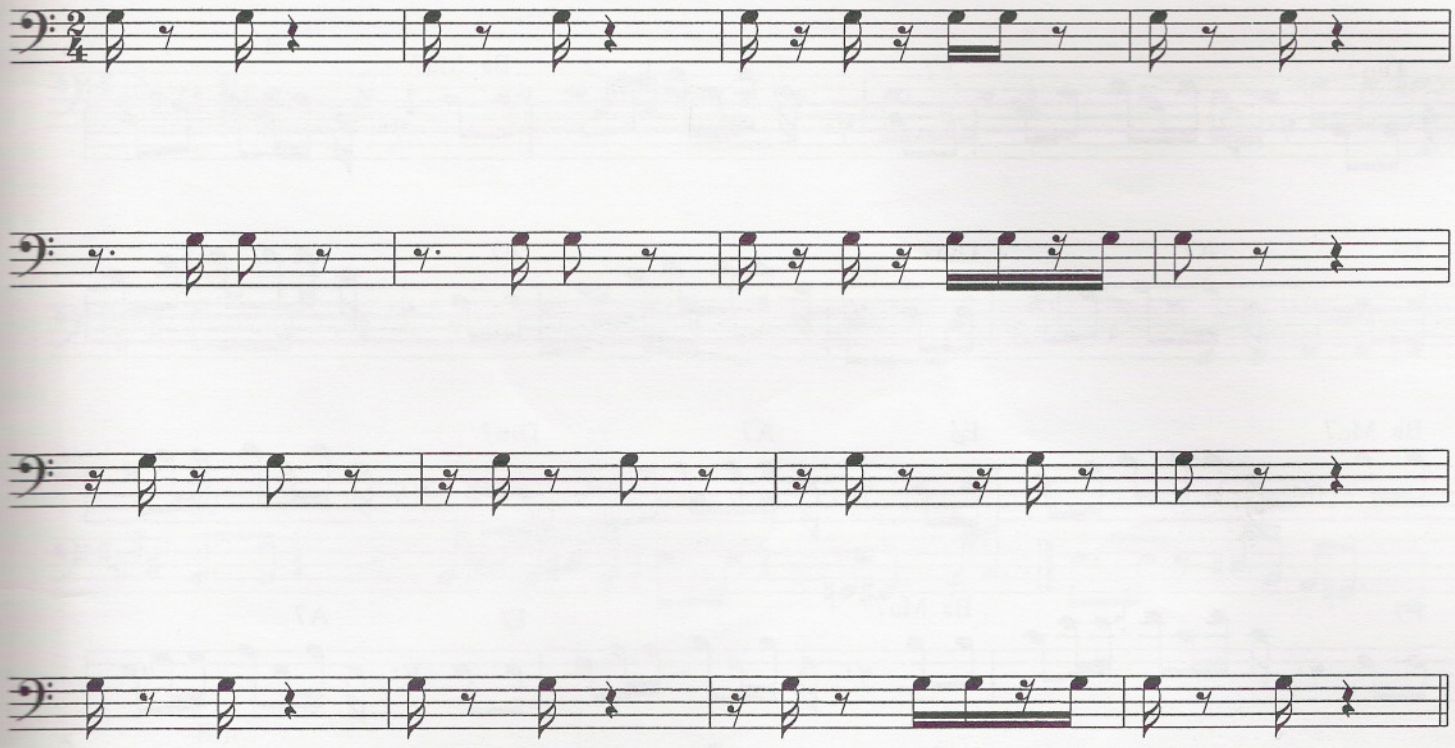
6.



7.

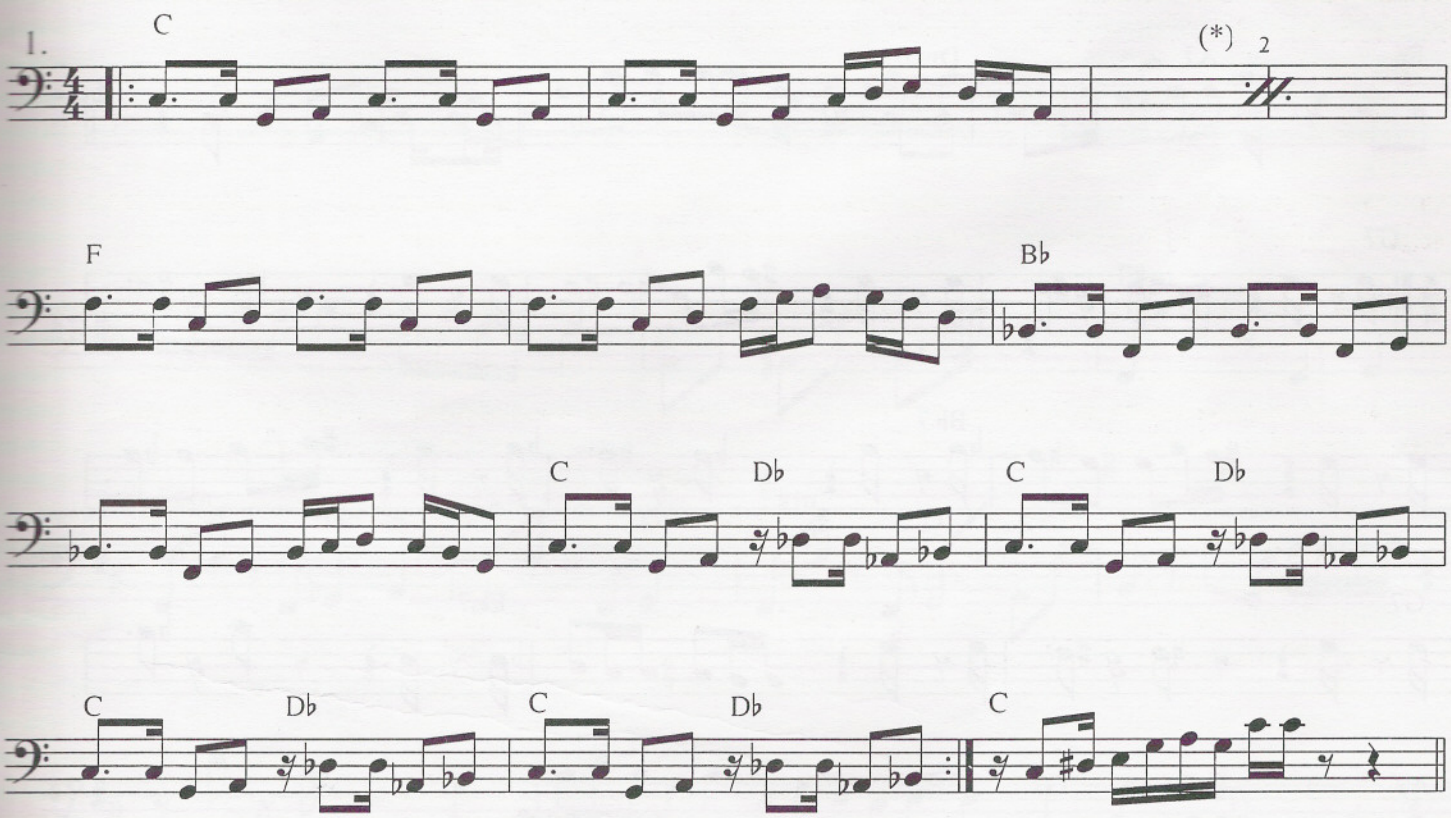


8.

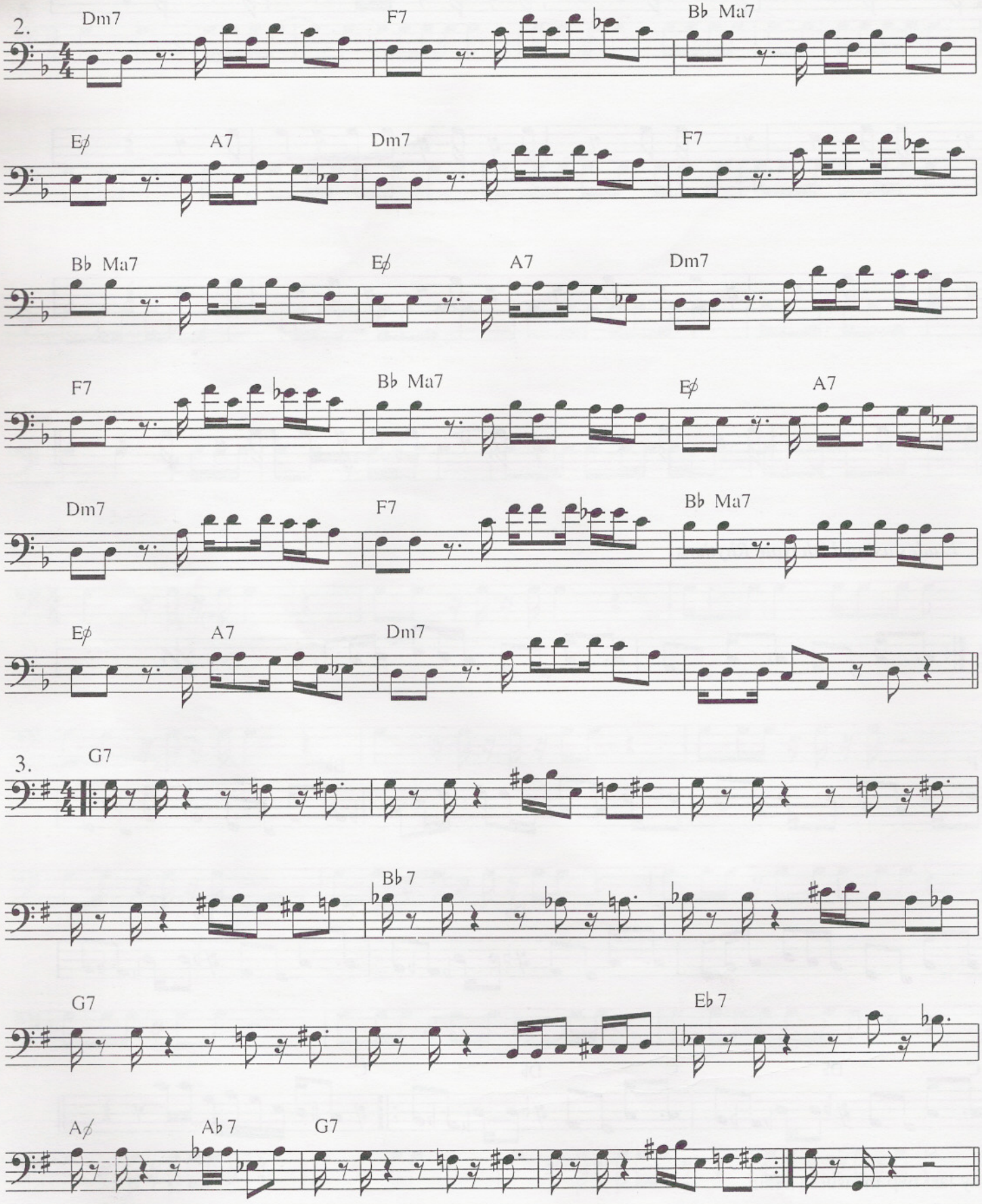


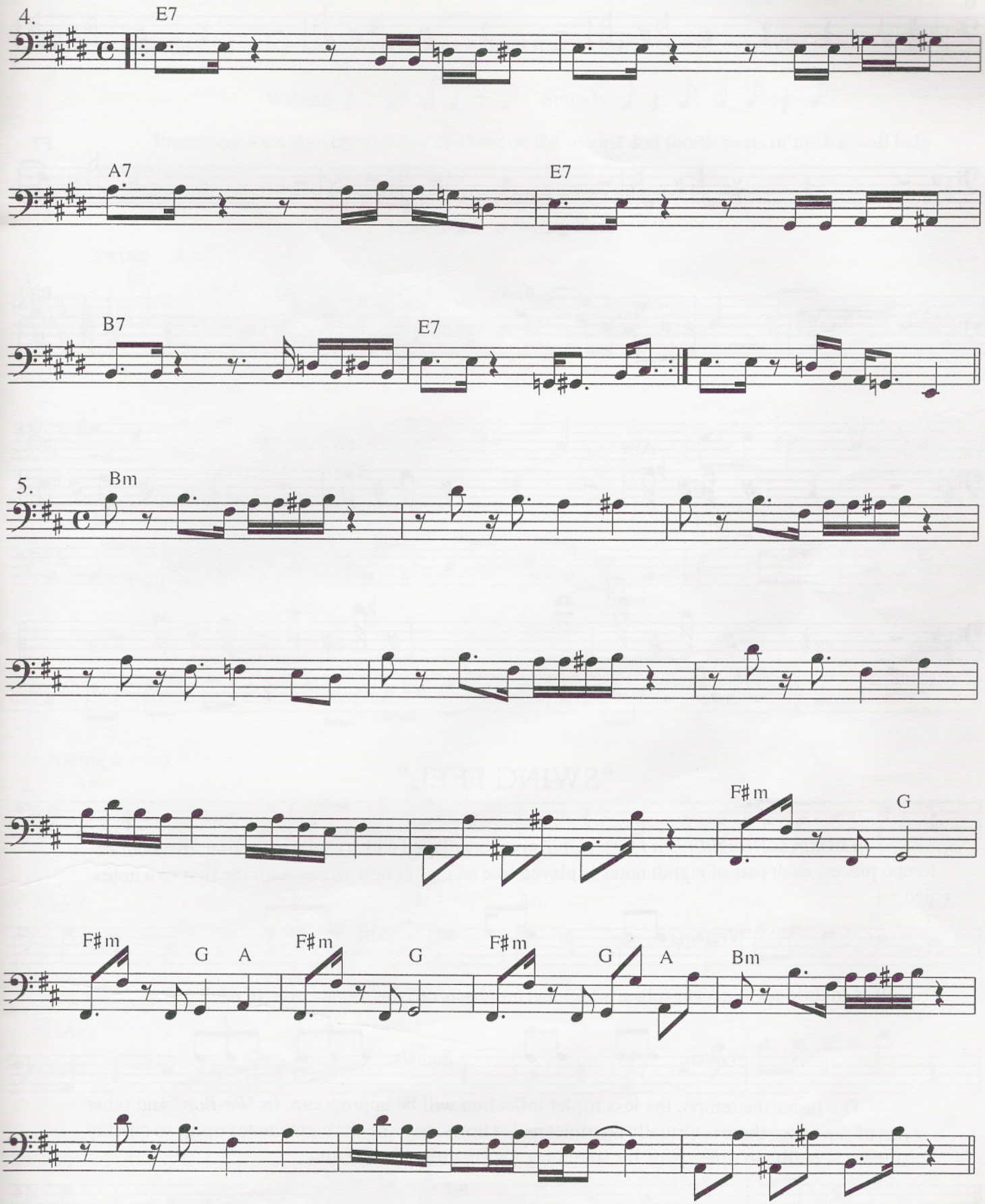
Etudes using 16th Note Rhythms:

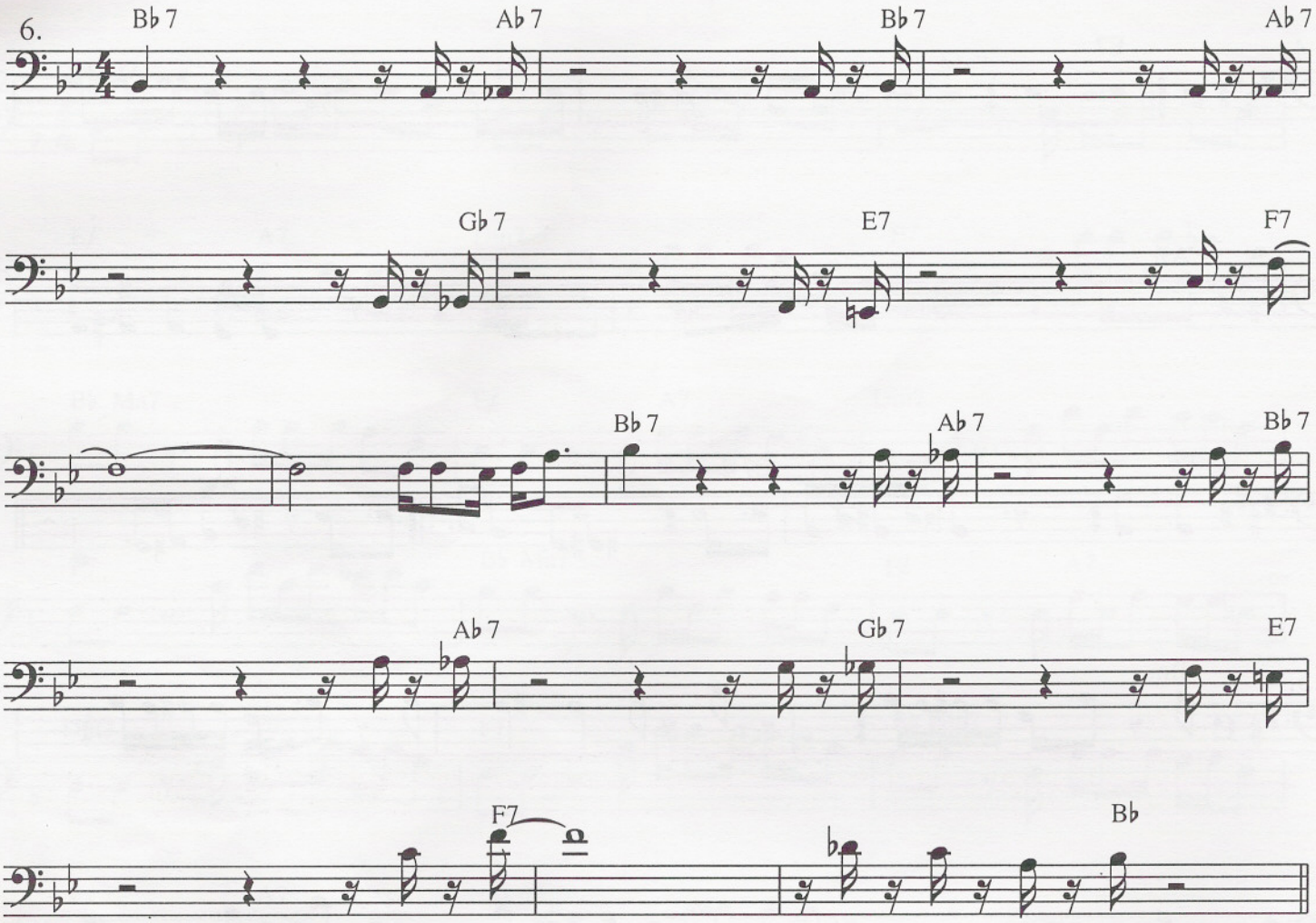
1.



* Play last two measures again

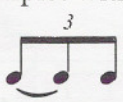

2.
Dm7
F7
B♭ Ma7
E∅
A7
Dm7
F7
B♭ Ma7
E∅
A7
Dm7
F7
B♭ Ma7
E∅
A7
Dm7
F7
B♭ Ma7
E∅
A7
Dm7
3.
G7
B♭ 7
G7
E♭ 7
A∅
A♭ 7
G7


4.
E7
A7
E7
B7
E7
5.
Bm
F♯m
G
F♯m
G
A
F♯m
G
F♯m
G
A
Bm

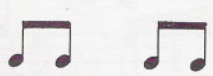
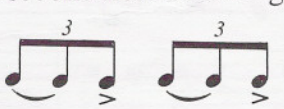


"SWING FEEL"

In *swing*, or *straight-ahead jazz*, eighth notes are played with a triplet inflection. In moderate tempo pieces, each pair of eighth notes is played like an eighth-note triplet with the first two notes tied.

Written: or But Sounds: 

It is traditional to *accent* (place additional emphasis on) the second note of each group.

Written:  Sounds: 

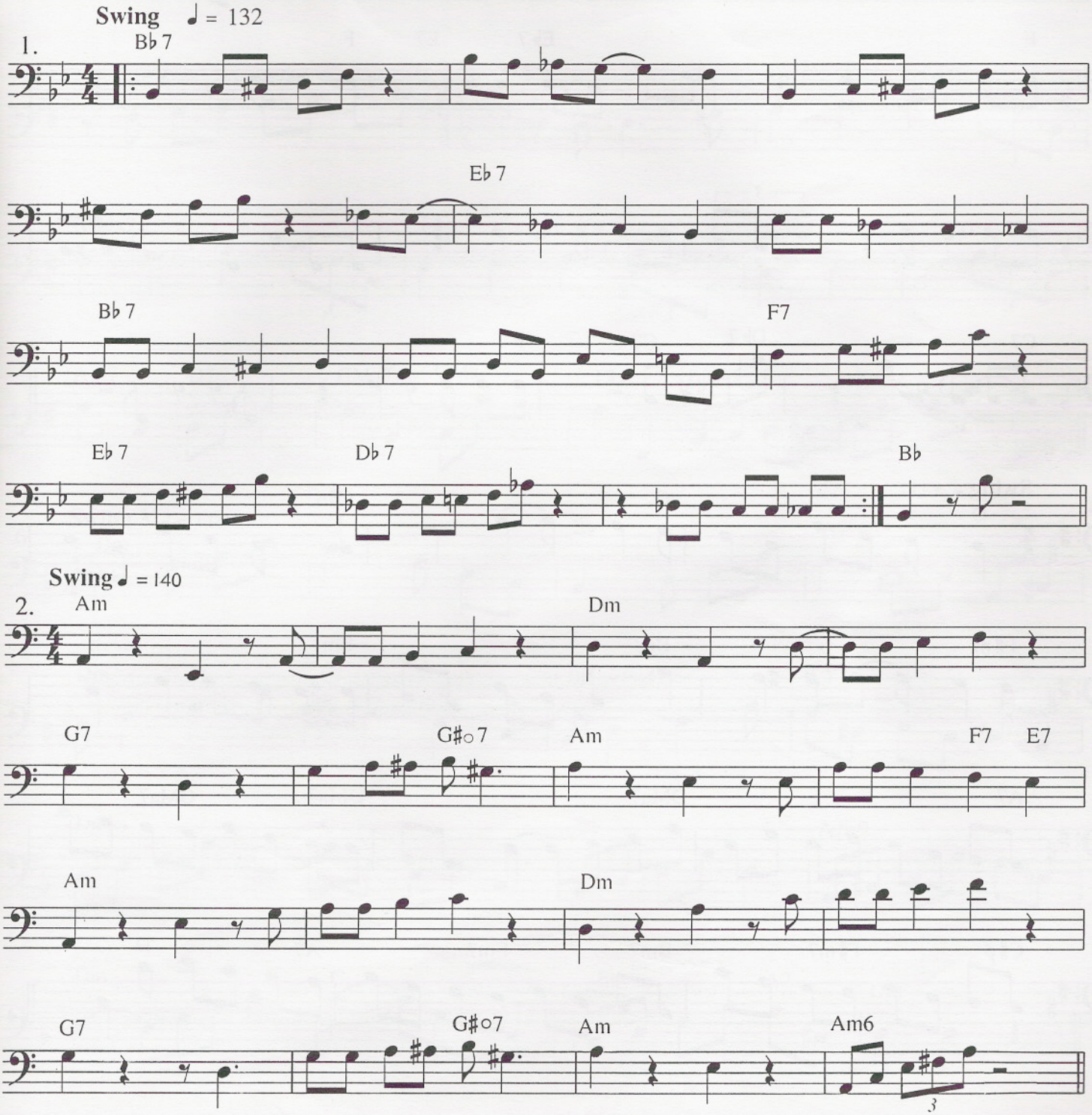
The faster the tempo, the less triplet inflection will be appropriate. In *"Be-Bop"* and other styles of *"up"* jazz, there is virtually no triplet feel at times, because the eighth notes occur so quickly that there is really no time-space for stretching the first of each two notes.

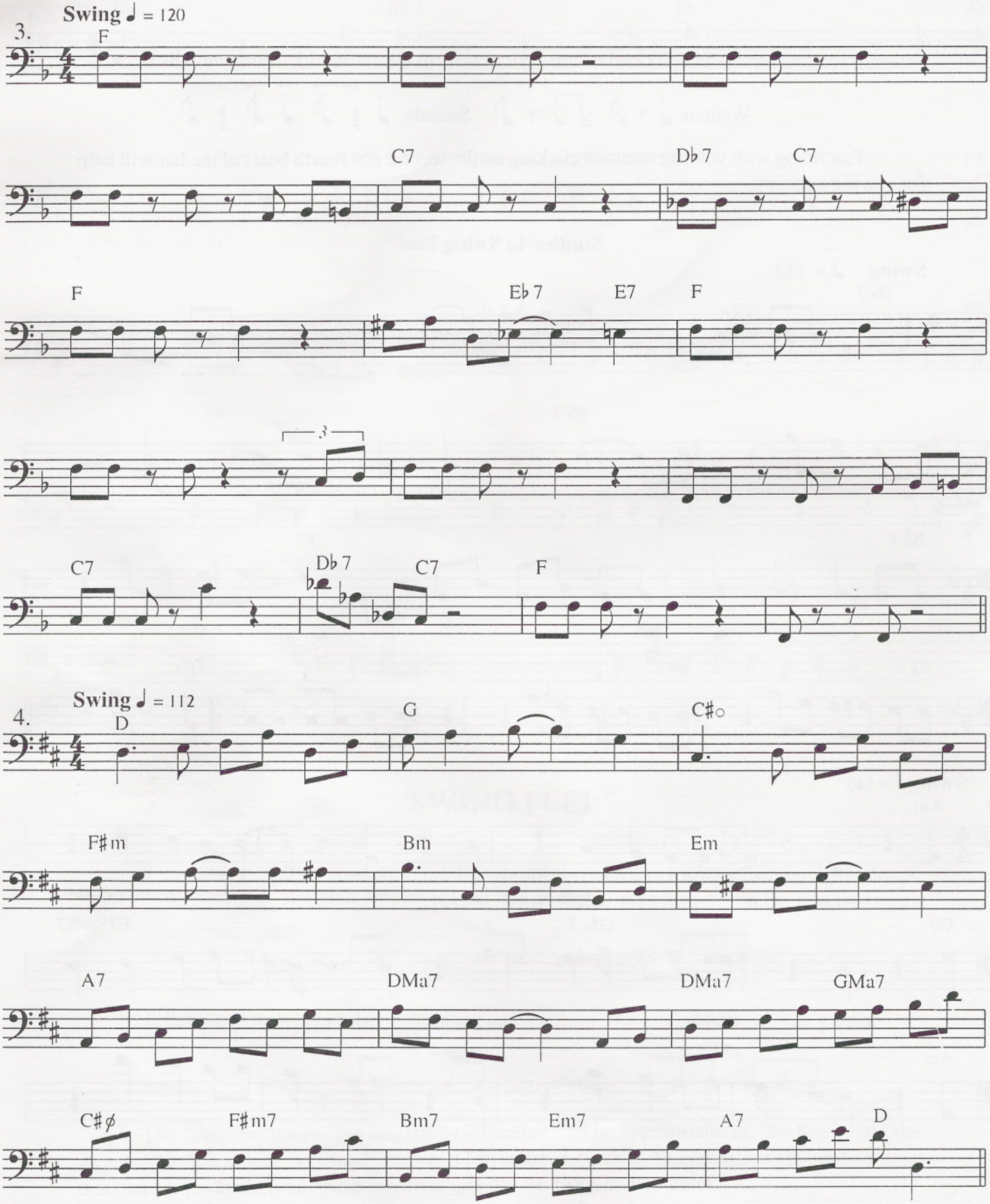
When playing swing-feel pieces, be sure to treat rests in the same way as regular notes.

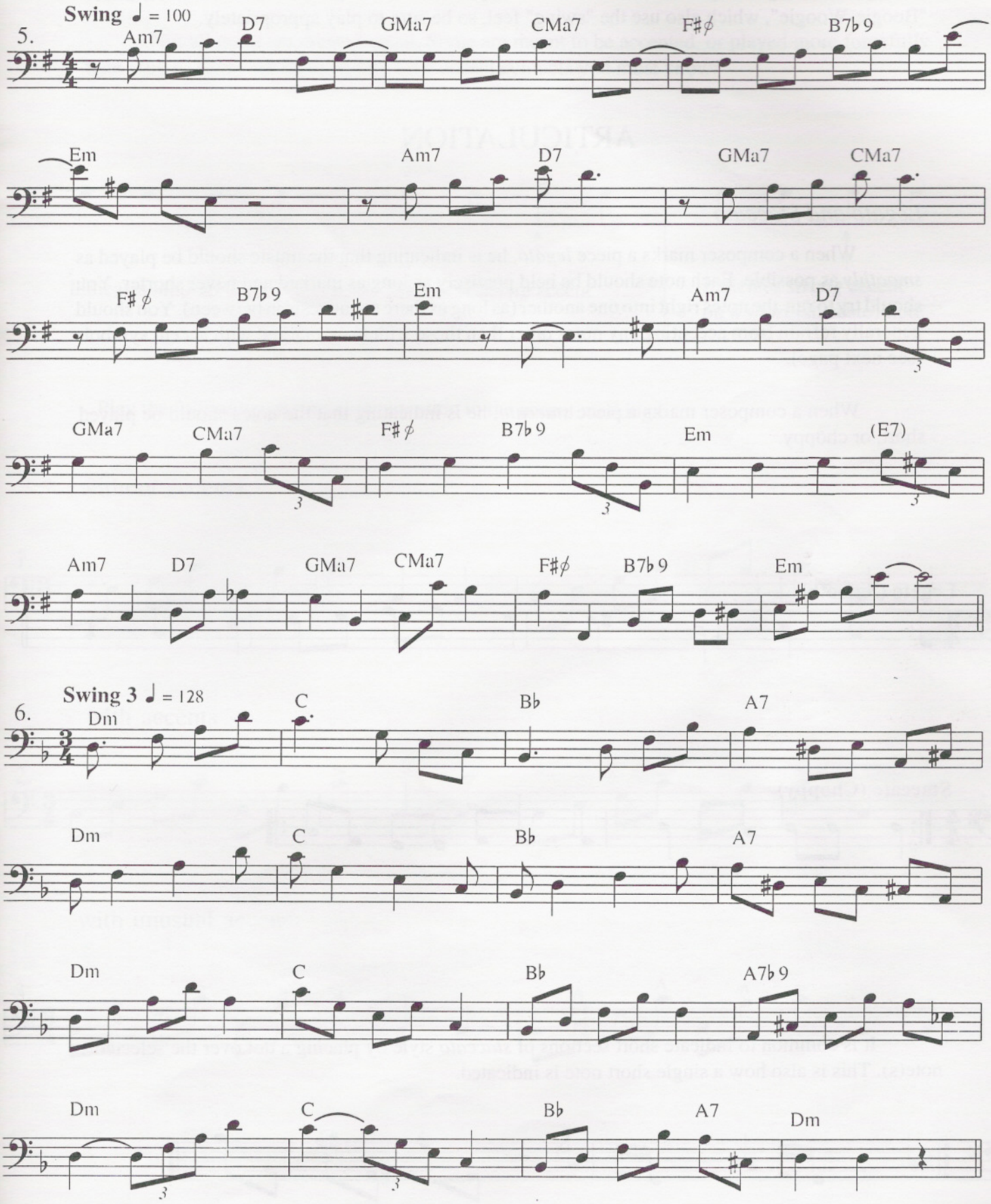
Written: ♩ 𝄾 ♪ ♫ 𝄾 ♪ Sounds: ♩ ♪ ♩ ♪ ♪

Practicing with your metronome clicking on the second and fourth beats of the bar will help your swing concept.

Studies in Swing Feel




Swing ♩ = 120
3.
F
C7
Db 7
C7
F
Eb 7
E7
F
3
C7
Db 7
C7
F
Swing ♩ = 112
4.
D
G
C#o
F#m
Bm
Em
A7
DMa7
DMa7
GMa7
C#ø
F#m7
Bm7
Em7
A7
D


Swing ♩ = 100
5.
Am7
D7
GMa7
CMa7
F#ø
B7♭9
Em
Am7
D7
GMa7
CMa7
F#ø
B7♭9
Em
Am7
D7
GMa7
CMa7
F#ø
B7♭9
Em
(E7)
Am7
D7
GMa7
CMa7
F#ø
B7♭9
Em
Swing 3 ♩ = 128
6.
Dm
C
B♭
A7
Dm
C
B♭
A7
Dm
C
B♭
A7♭9
Dm
C
B♭
A7
Dm

Make sure you're always aware of whether the composer's intention is to have you play "swing" or "straight" eighth notes. There are many other music styles, such as "Broadway" and "Boogie-Woogie", which also use the "swing" feel, so be sure to play appropriately.

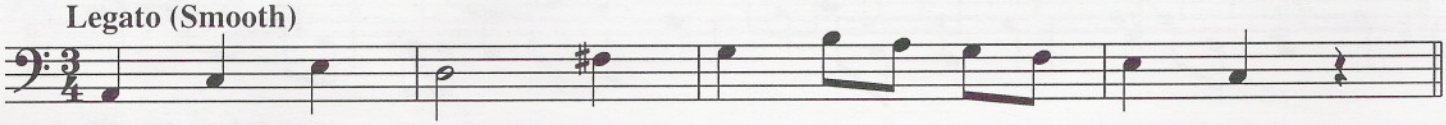
ARTICULATION

Legato and Staccato

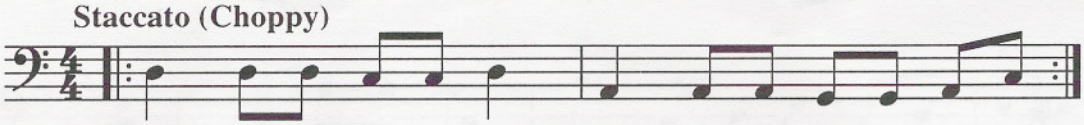
When a composer marks a piece *legato*, he is indicating that the music should be played as *smoothly* as possible. Each note should be held precisely as long as marked and never shorter. You should try to run the notes right into one another (as long as there are no rests in between). You should generally refrain from accenting any notes other than those which are marked with accent symbols (see next page).

When a composer marks a piece *staccato*, he is indicating that the notes should be played short, or choppy.

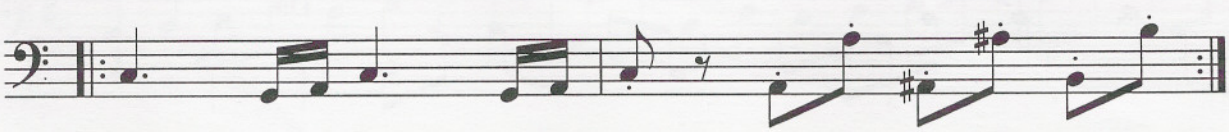
Legato (Smooth)



Staccato (Choppy)

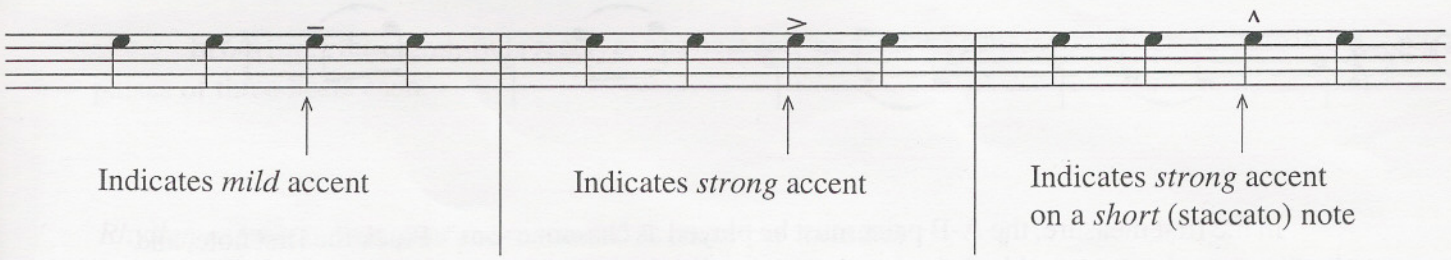


It is common to indicate short sections of *staccato* style by placing a dot over the selected note(s). This is also how a single short note is indicated.



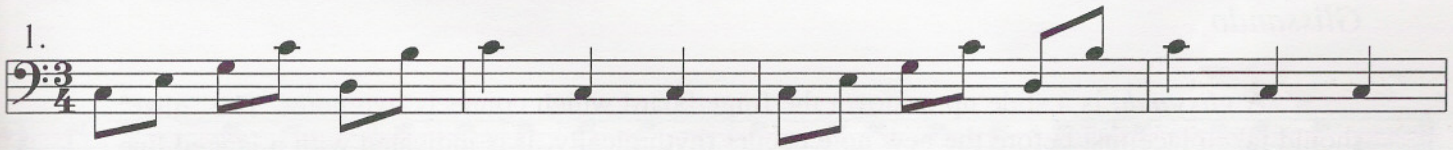
Accents

Not all notes are created equal. Some are meant to be accented, or played more forcefully than others. There are three widely used accent symbols you must know:

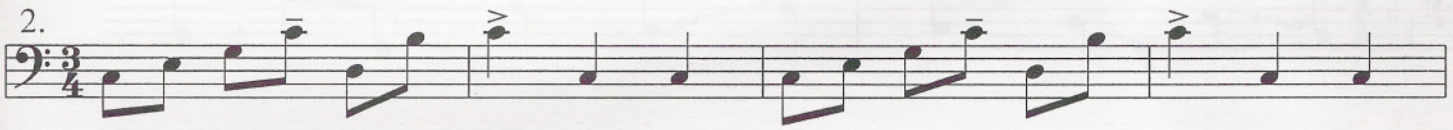


Play the following, paying strict attention to the accent markings.

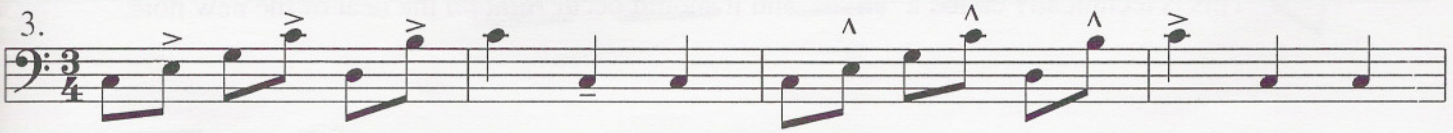
without accents



with accents



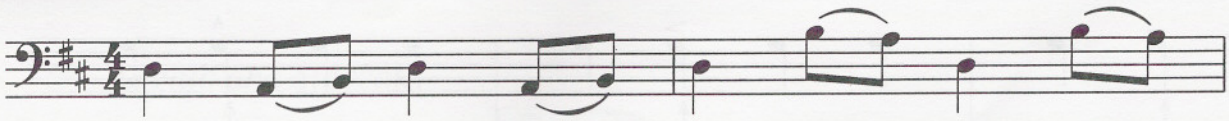
with unusual accents



Slurs

When two notes of different pitch are grouped together with a tie, those two notes should be played with only one pluck of the right picking hand (or one bow stroke).

For example:

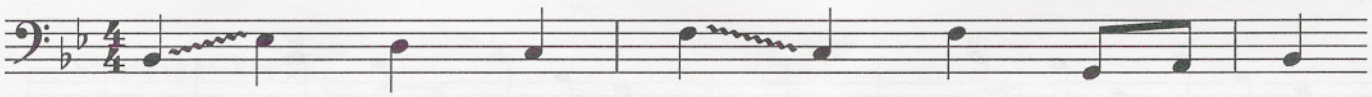


In the first measure, the A-B pairs must be played as "hammer-ons". Pluck the first note, and make the second note sound by bringing the appropriate new finger down hard on the string.

In the second measure, the B-A pairs must be played as "pull-offs". Pluck the first note while both notes to be played are being pressed to the fingerboard; then forcefully pull the original finger sideways off the string, causing the new note to sound.

Glissando

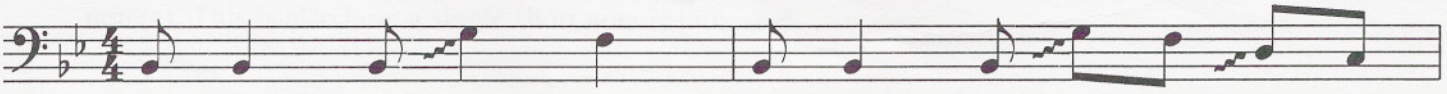
A *glissando* is a slide up or down the fingerboard which connects two notes. The "gliss" should take place just before the new note occurs rhythmically. It is indicated with a jagged line between the two notes:



These two notes must be played on the same string whenever possible.

A short, jagged line indicates that a note is to be "slid" into from a short distance below (how far is your decision).

This is technically called a *"slide"*, and it should occur right *on* the beat of the new note.

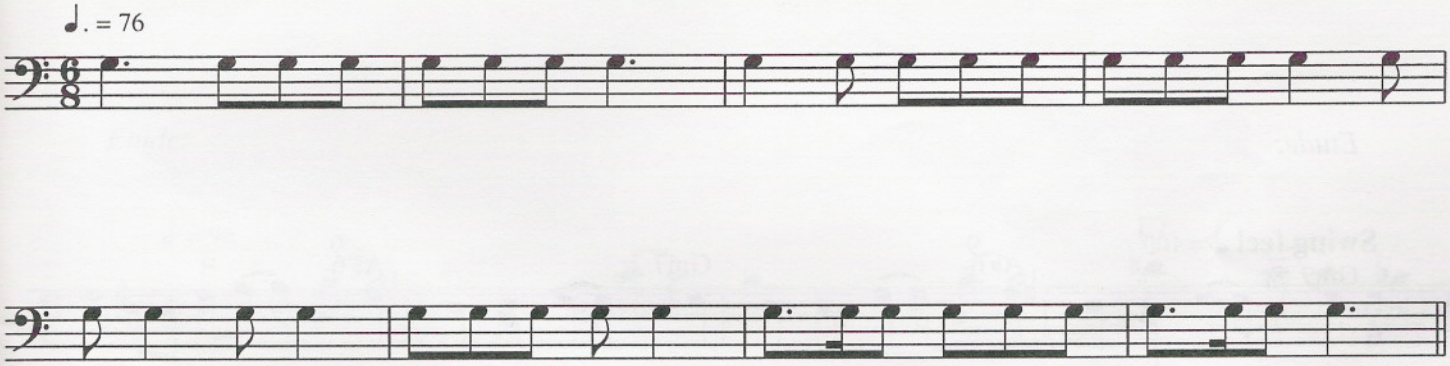


MORE TIME SIGNATURES

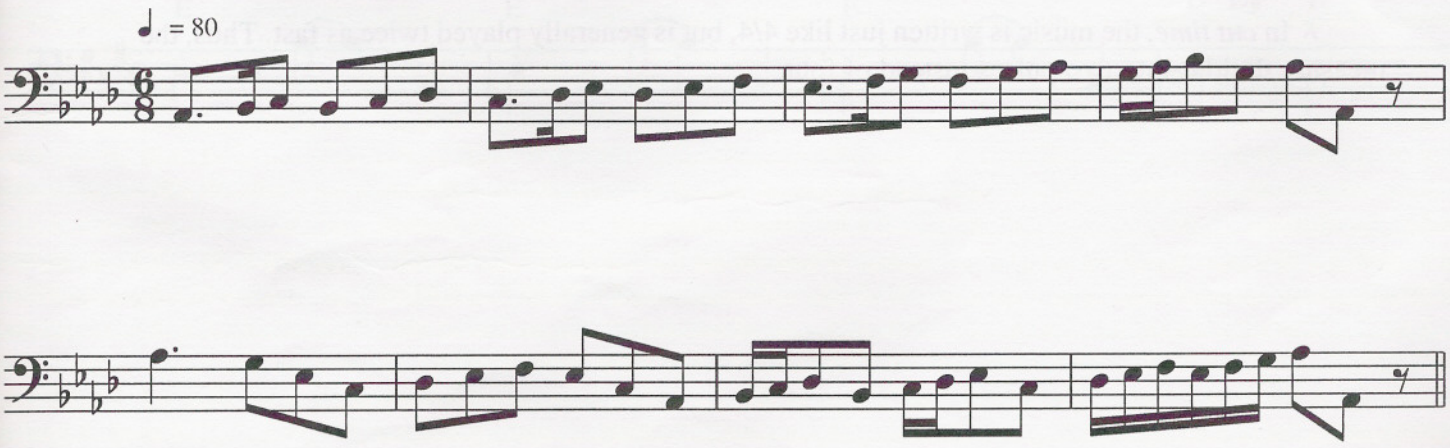
Here's a look at 6/8, 5/4, and cut time. These are fairly common time signatures that you are likely to encounter in professional situations. Of course, there are many others you may run into; hopefully by then, you'll have the savvy necessary to decipher anything put on paper.

In 6/8 time, the eighth-note receives one beat and the measure generally sub-divides into two pulses of three beats each.

Rhythm exercise: (set your metronome to 2 clicks per measure)

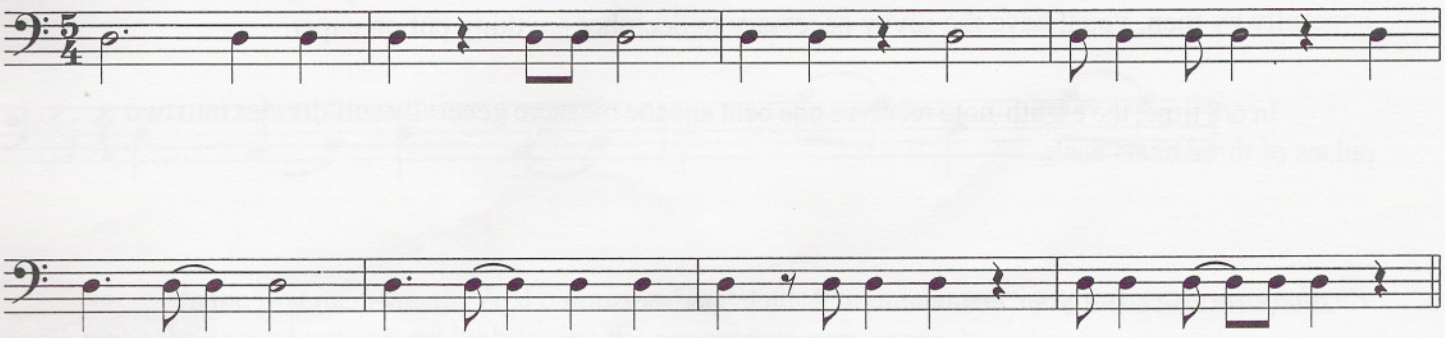


Etude:

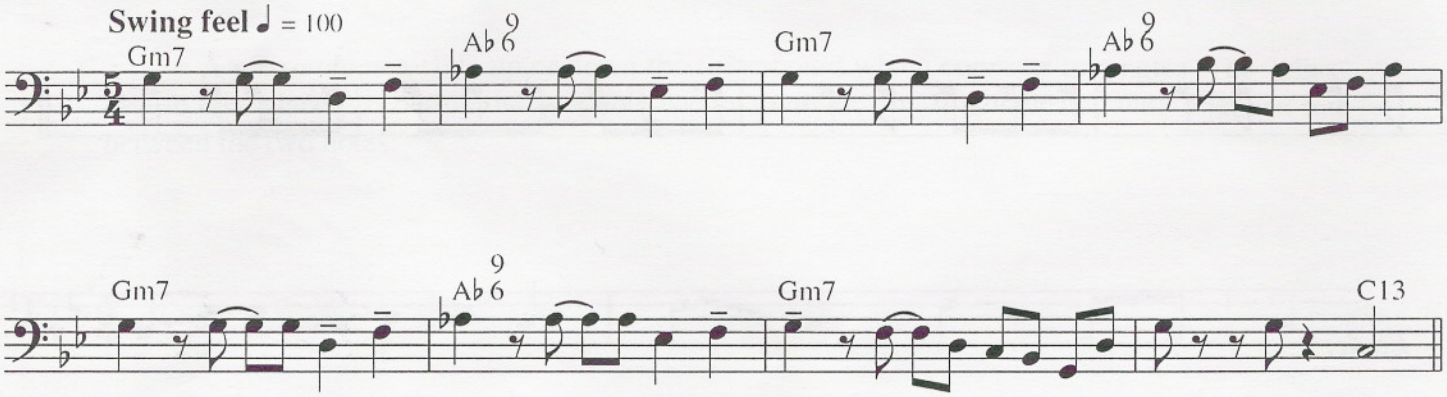


In 5/4 time, the quarter note receives one beat, and the measure generally feels like 3 plus 2.

Rhythm exercise:

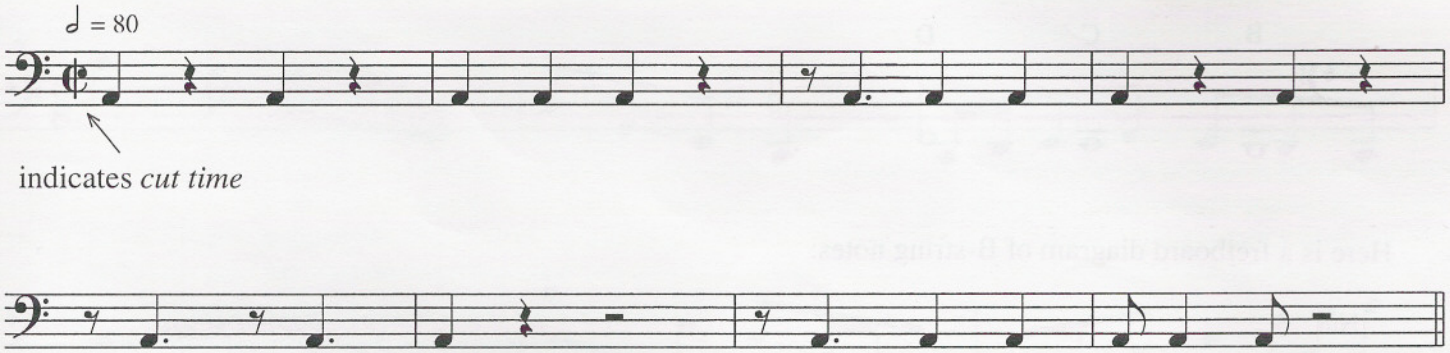


Etude:

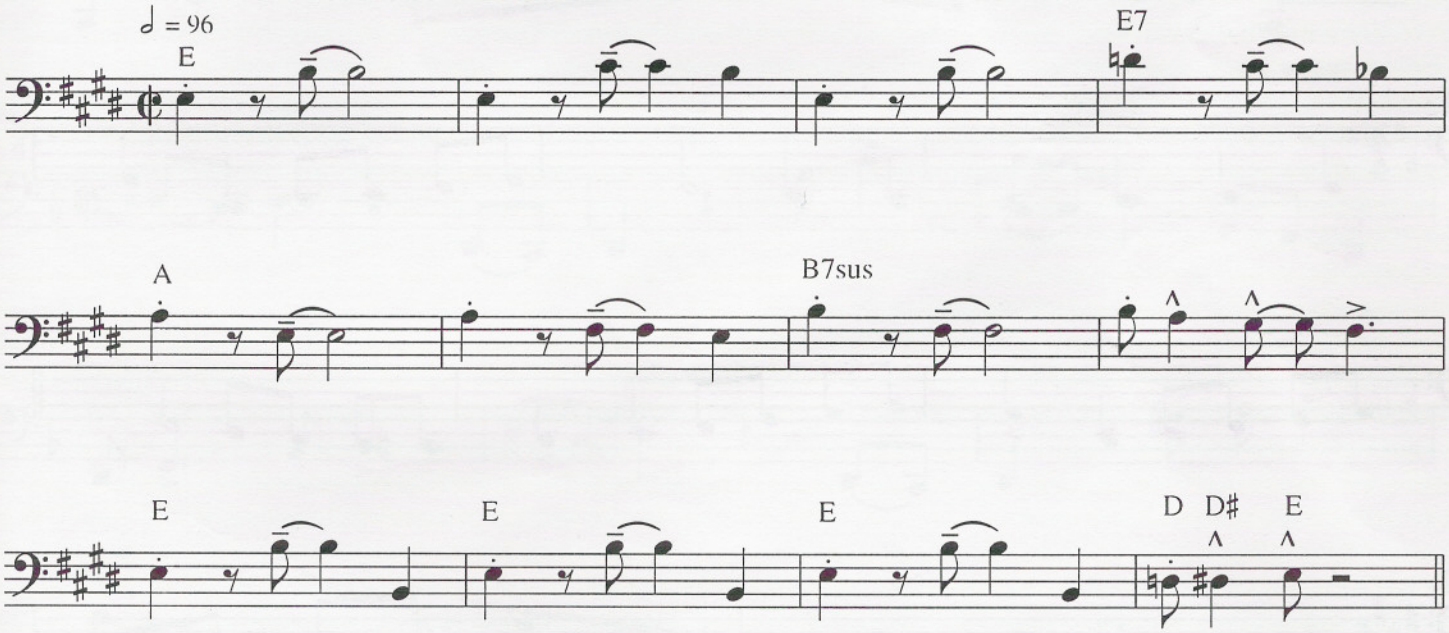


In *cut time*, the music is written just like 4/4, but is generally played twice as fast. Thus, the measure divides into two pulses instead of four.

Rhythm exercise:



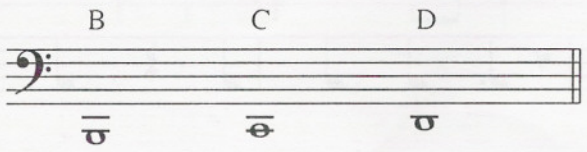
Etude:



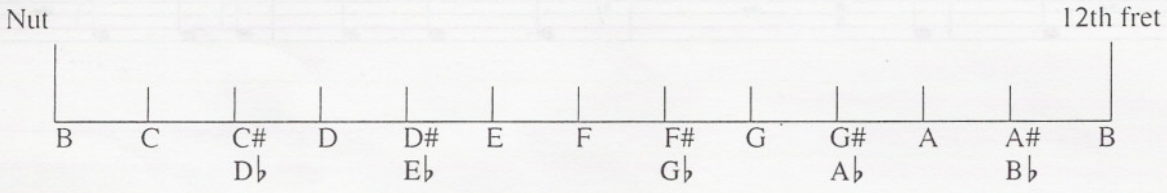
LOW "B" STUDIES

For 5- and 6-string basses

Here are the natural notes found in the lowest position on the B string:

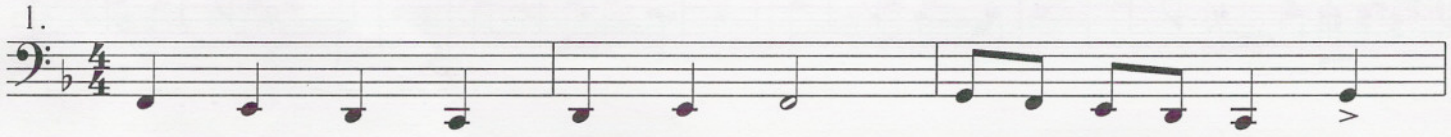


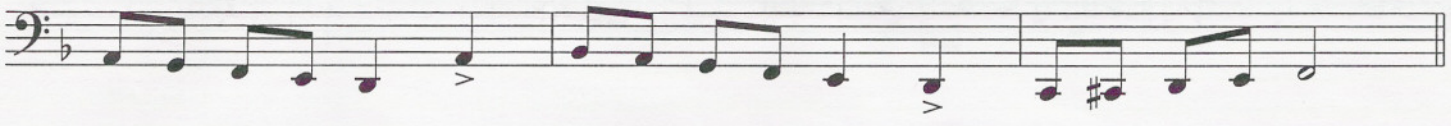
Here is a fretboard diagram of B-string notes:



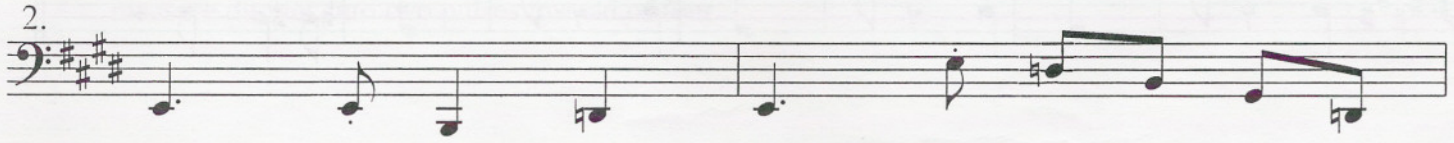
Etudes:

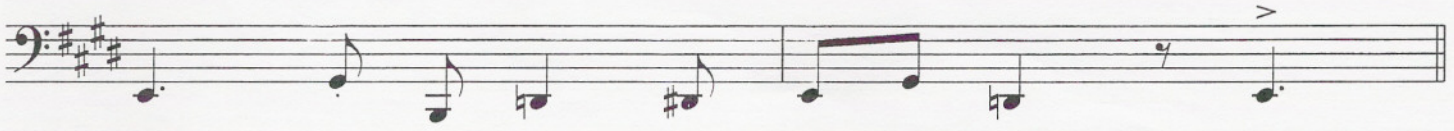
1.

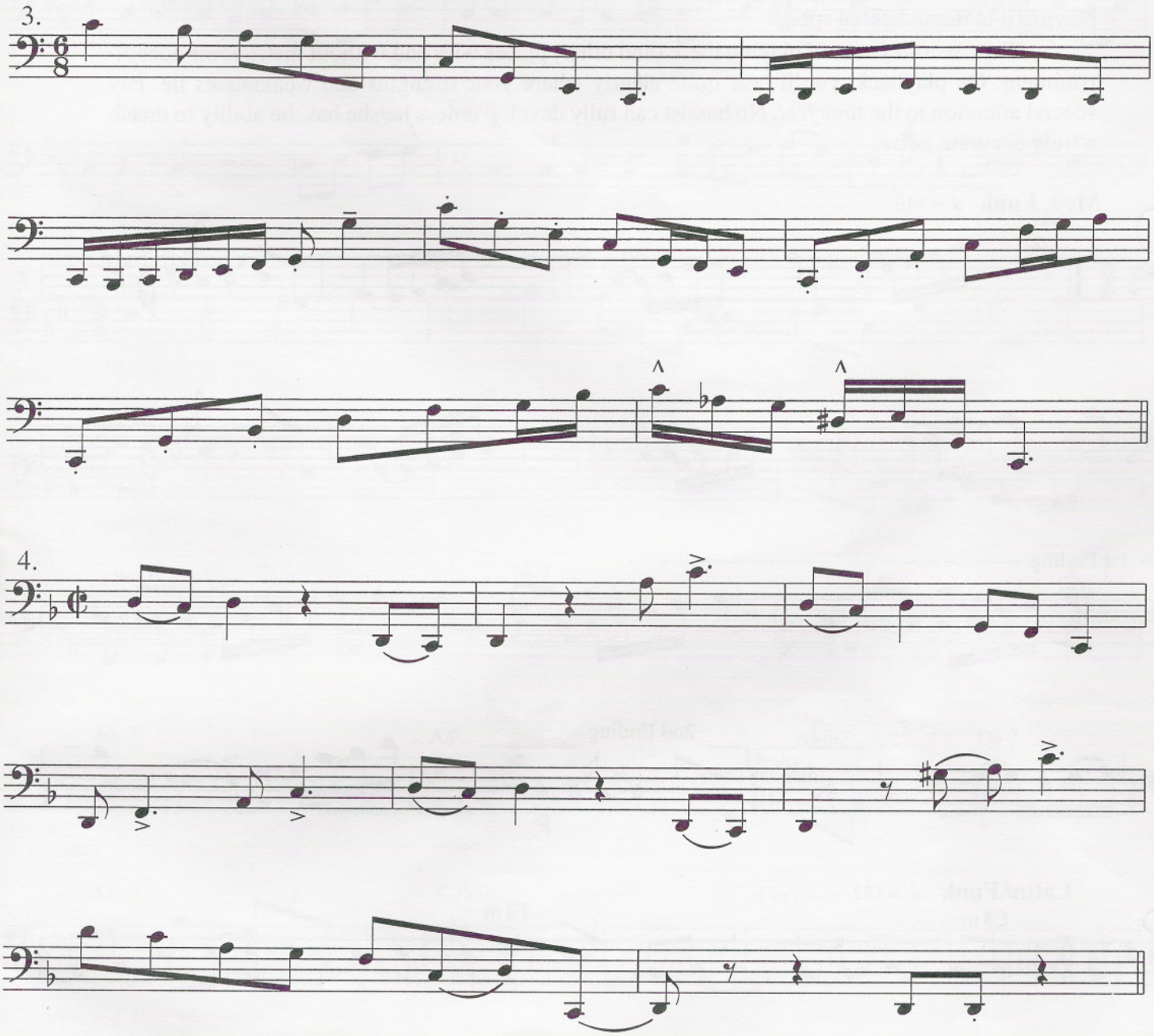




2.





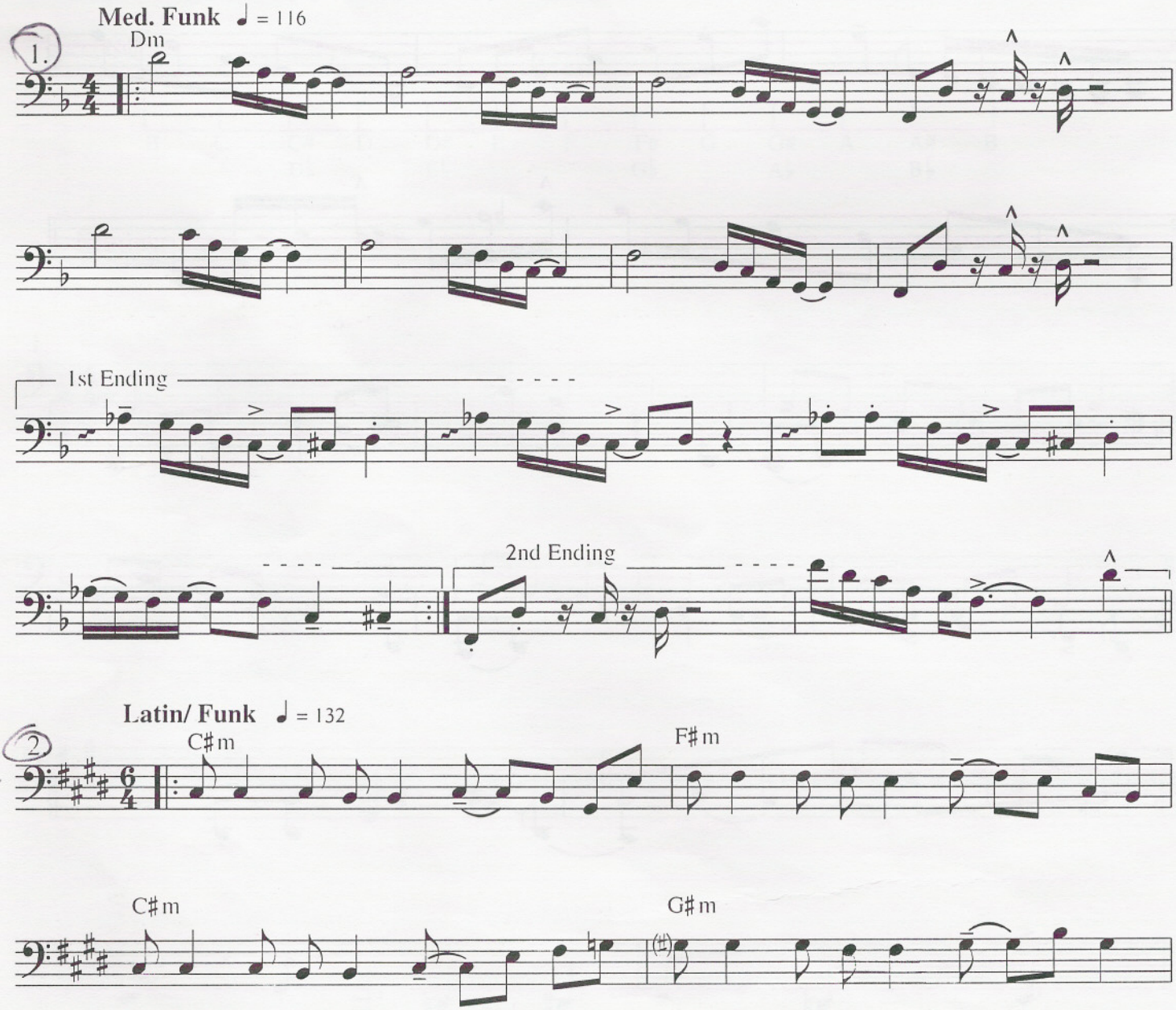

3.
4.

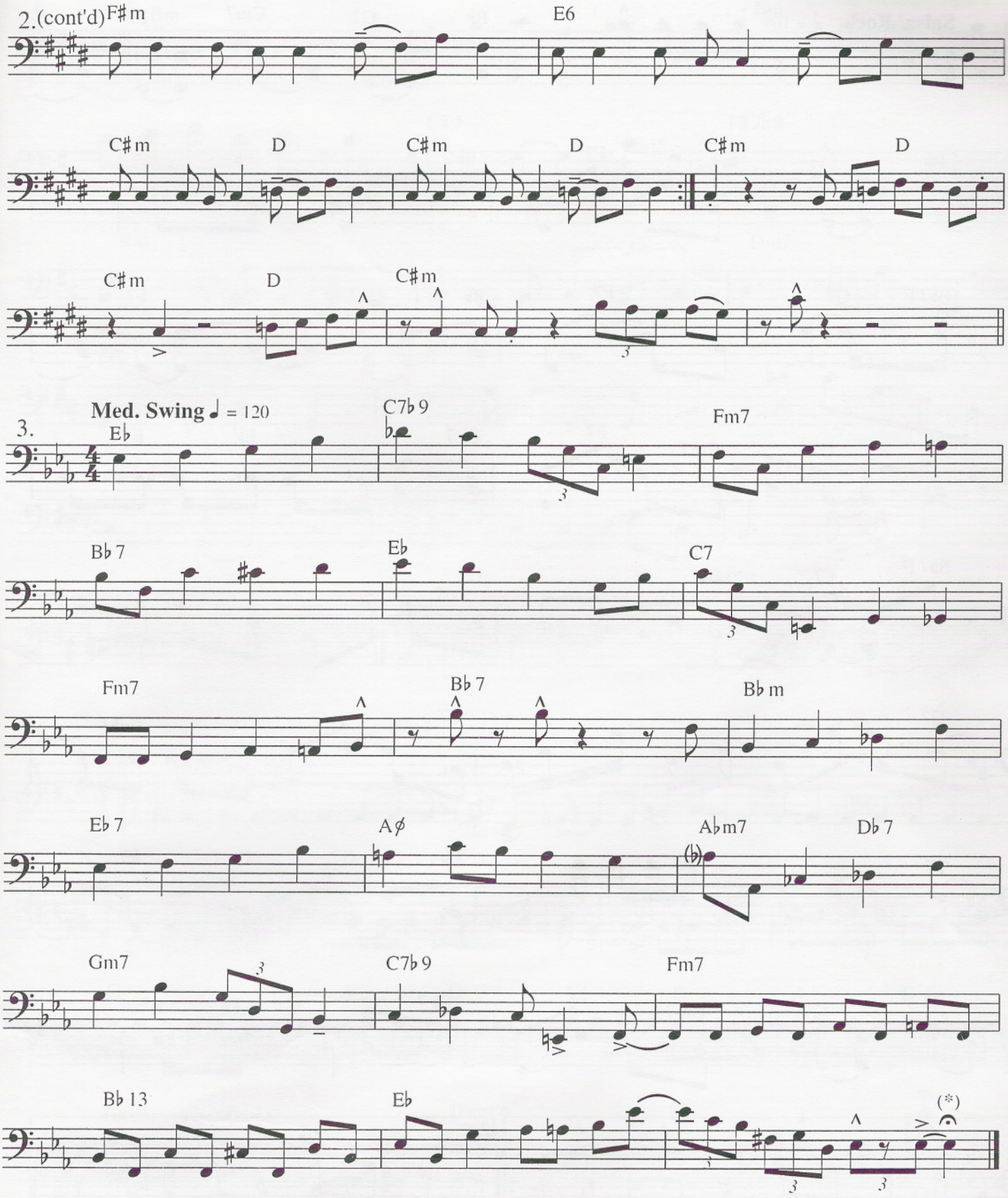
ADVANCED READING STUDIES

The following studies are scaled-down bass parts, the likes of which advanced amateur and professional musicians can expect to encounter in real-life playing situations.

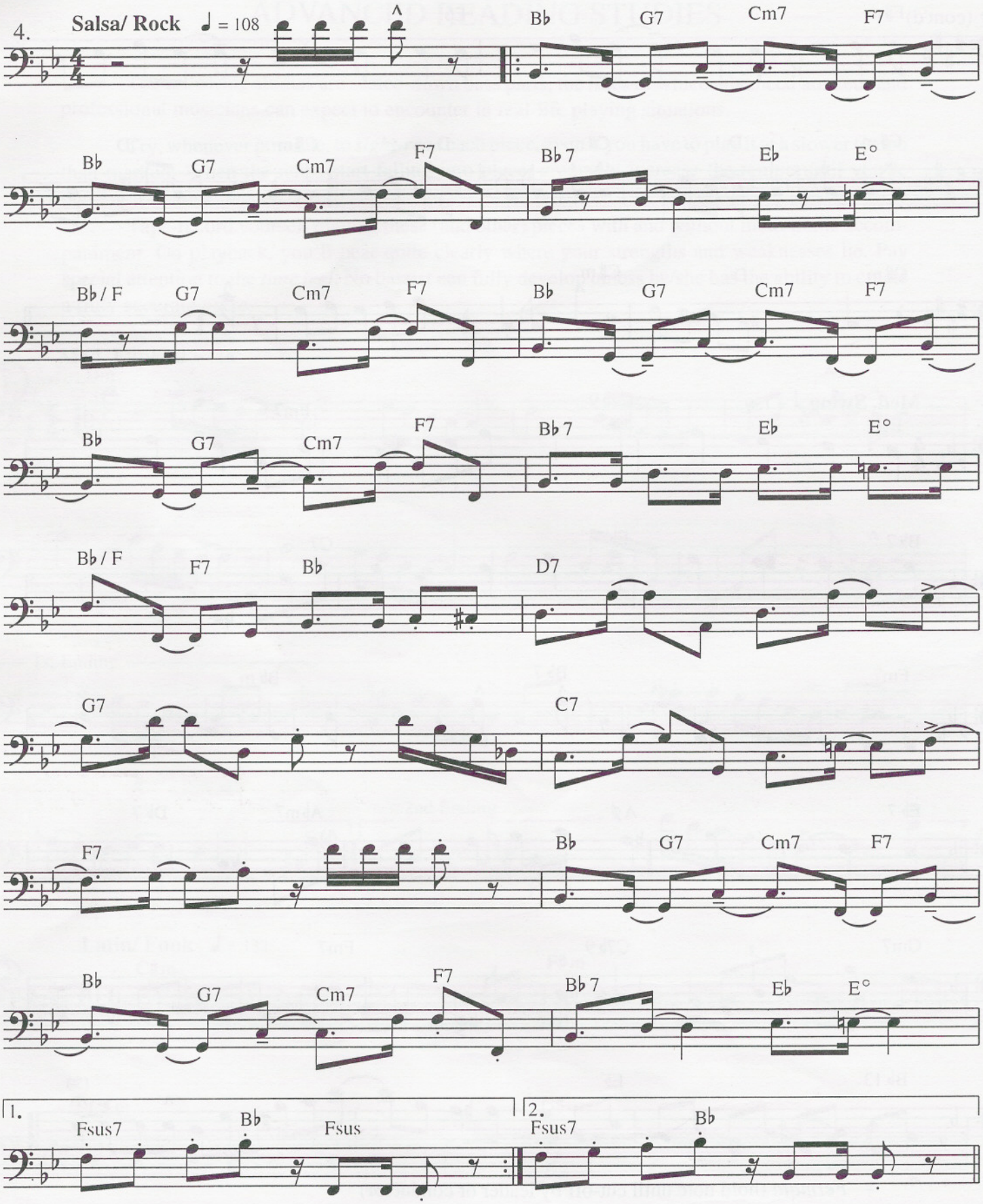
Try, whenever possible, to *sight-read* each piece, even if you have to play it at a slower tempo than marked. When the notes start falling into place, gradually increase the tempo until you're playing it at the indicated speed.

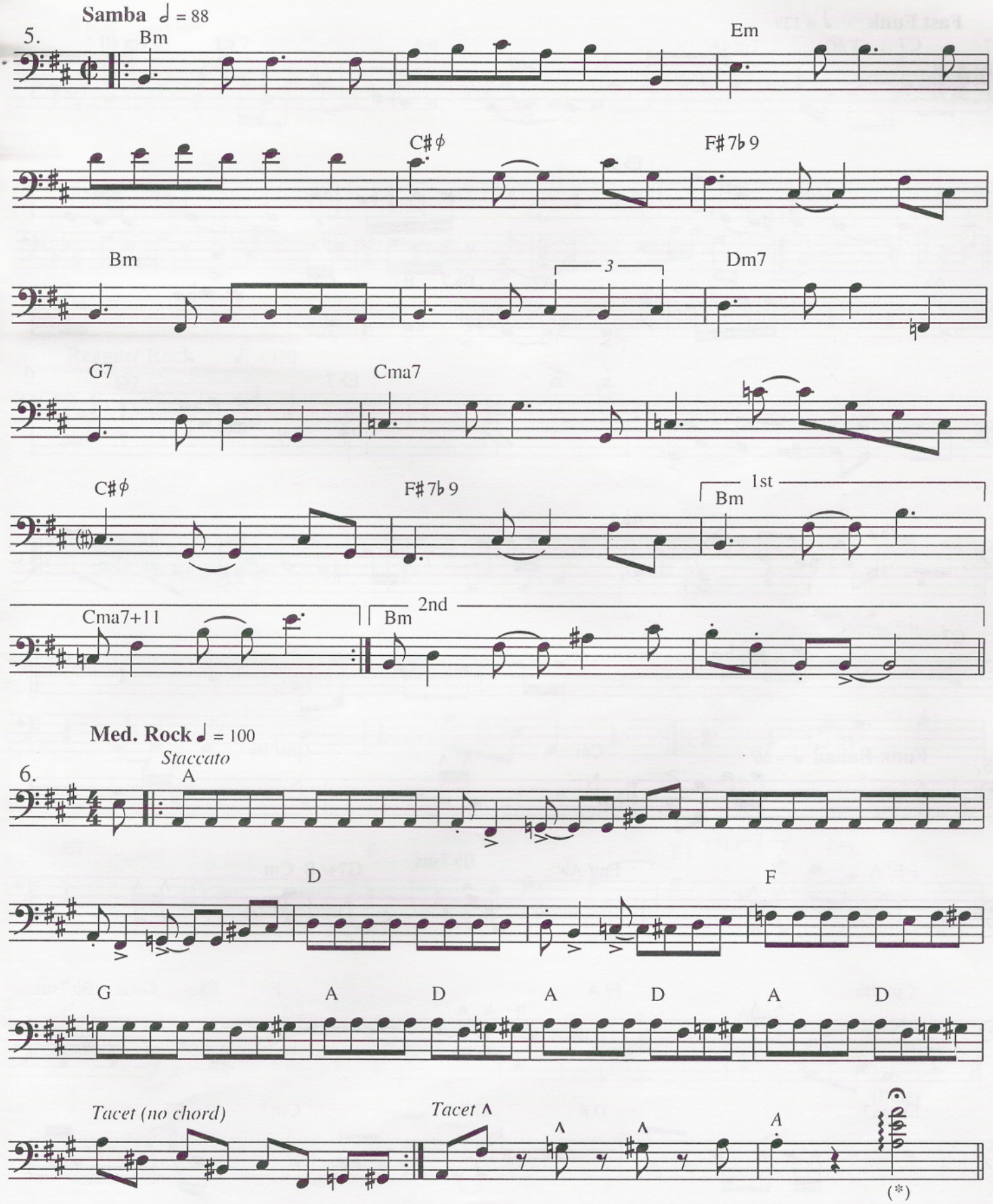
Tape-record yourself playing these (and other) pieces with and without metronome accompaniment. On playback, you'll hear quite clearly where your strengths and weaknesses lie. Pay special attention to the *time feel*. No bassist can fully develop unless he/she has the ability to create a truly accurate *pulse*.



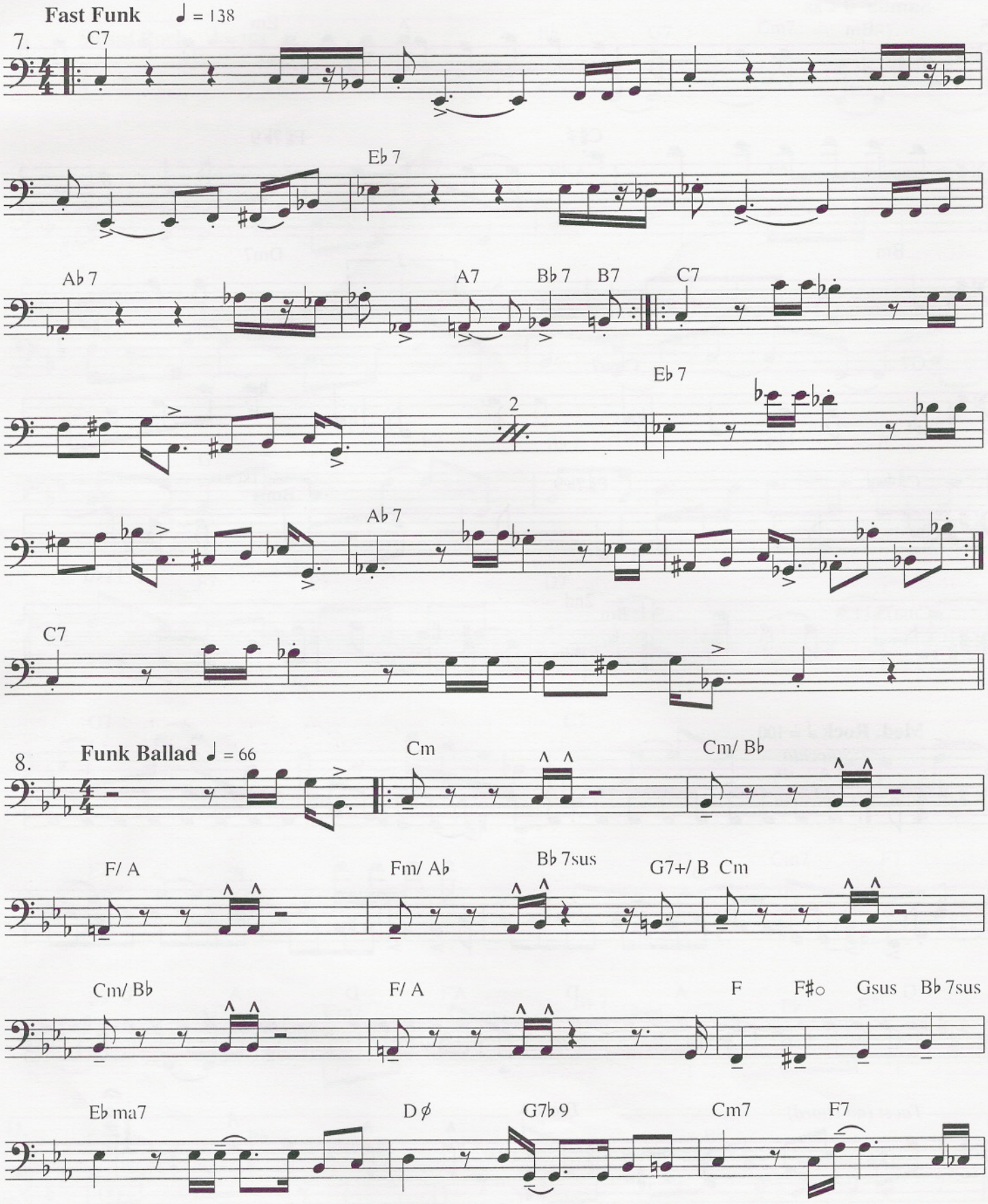


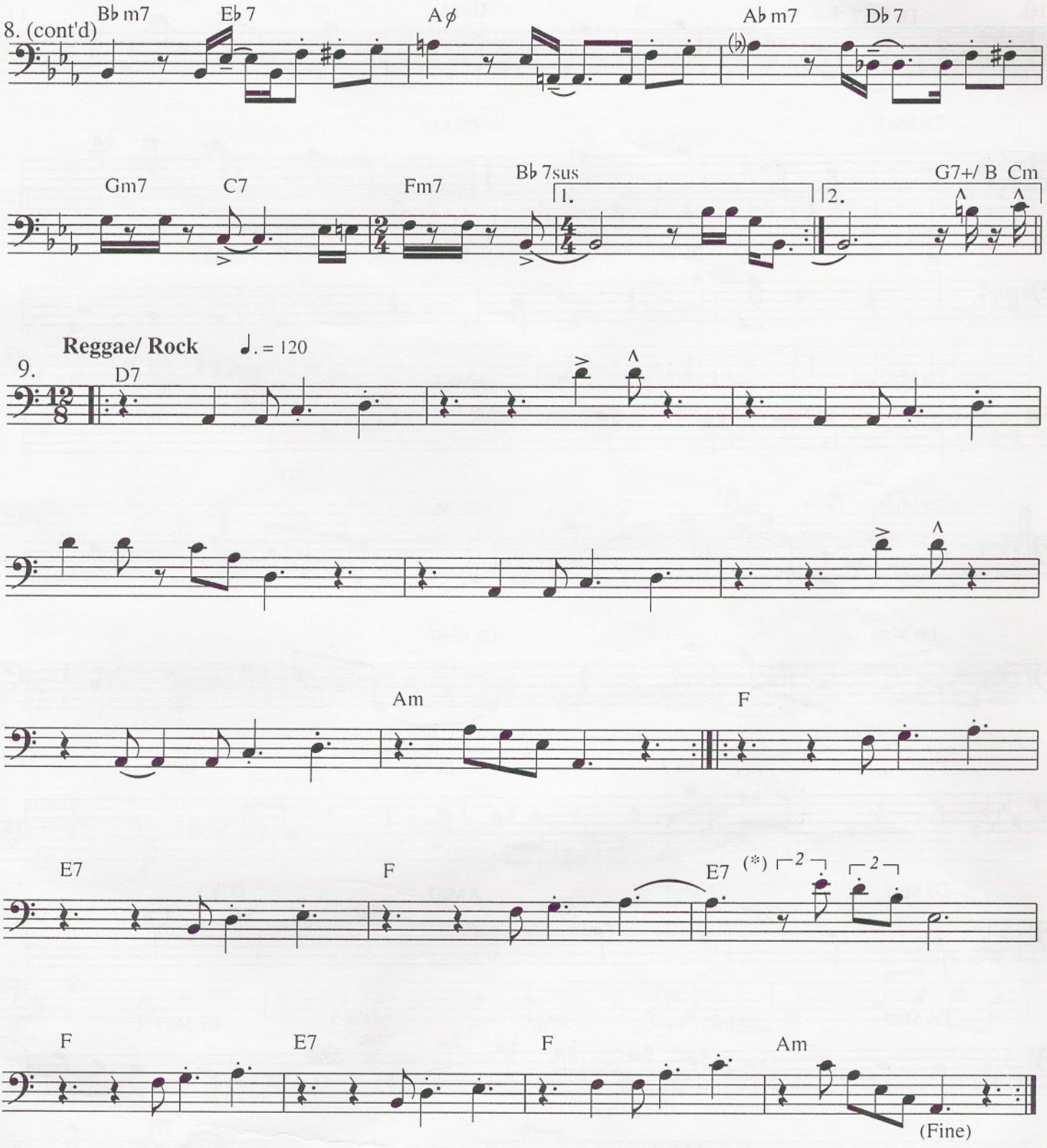
* 𝄐 = *Fermata* (hold note until cut-off by leader or conductor)


4.
Salsa/ Rock
♩ = 108
B♭
G7
Cm7
F7
B♭ 7
E♭
E°
B♭ / F
1.
2.
Fsus7
Fsus

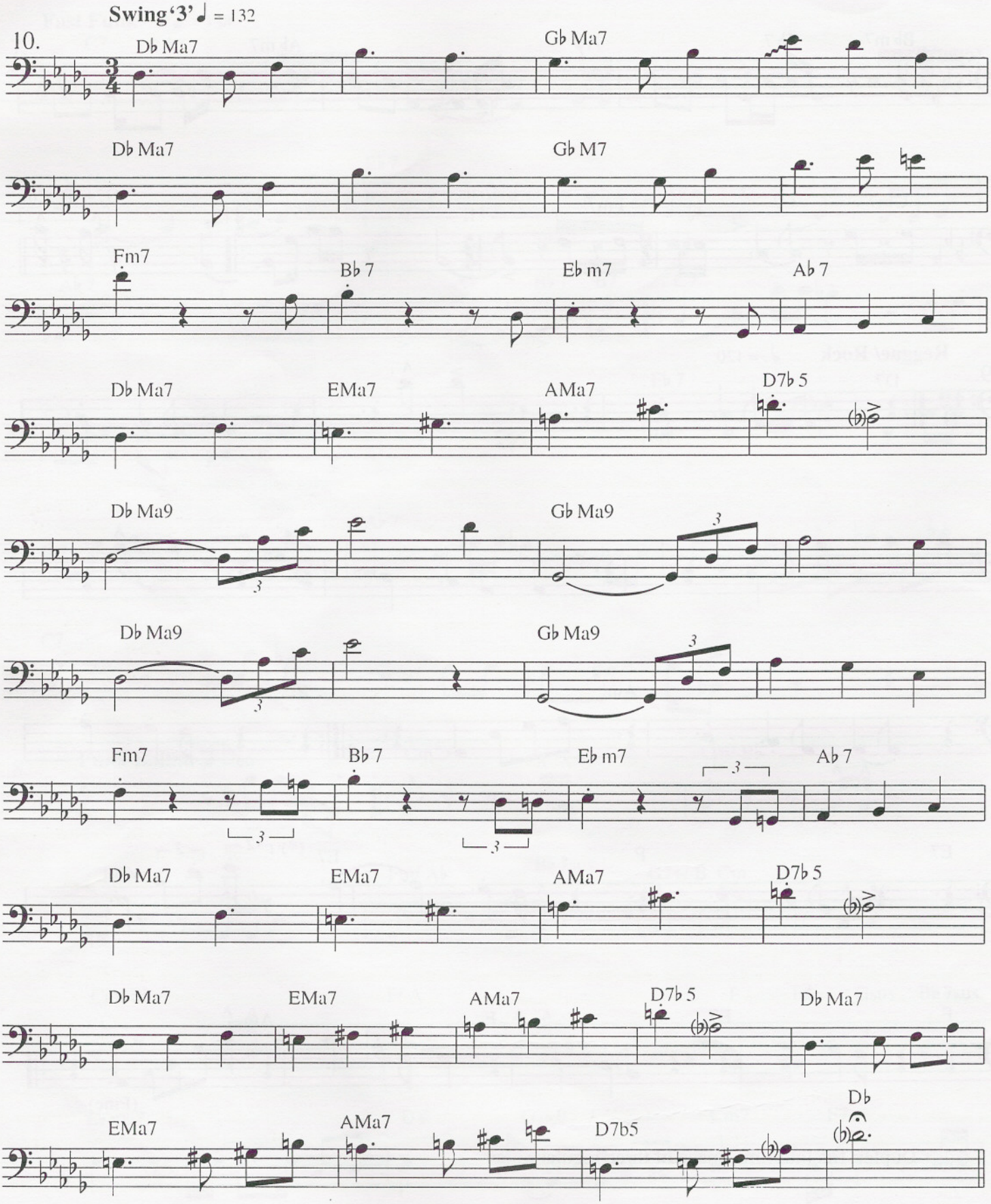


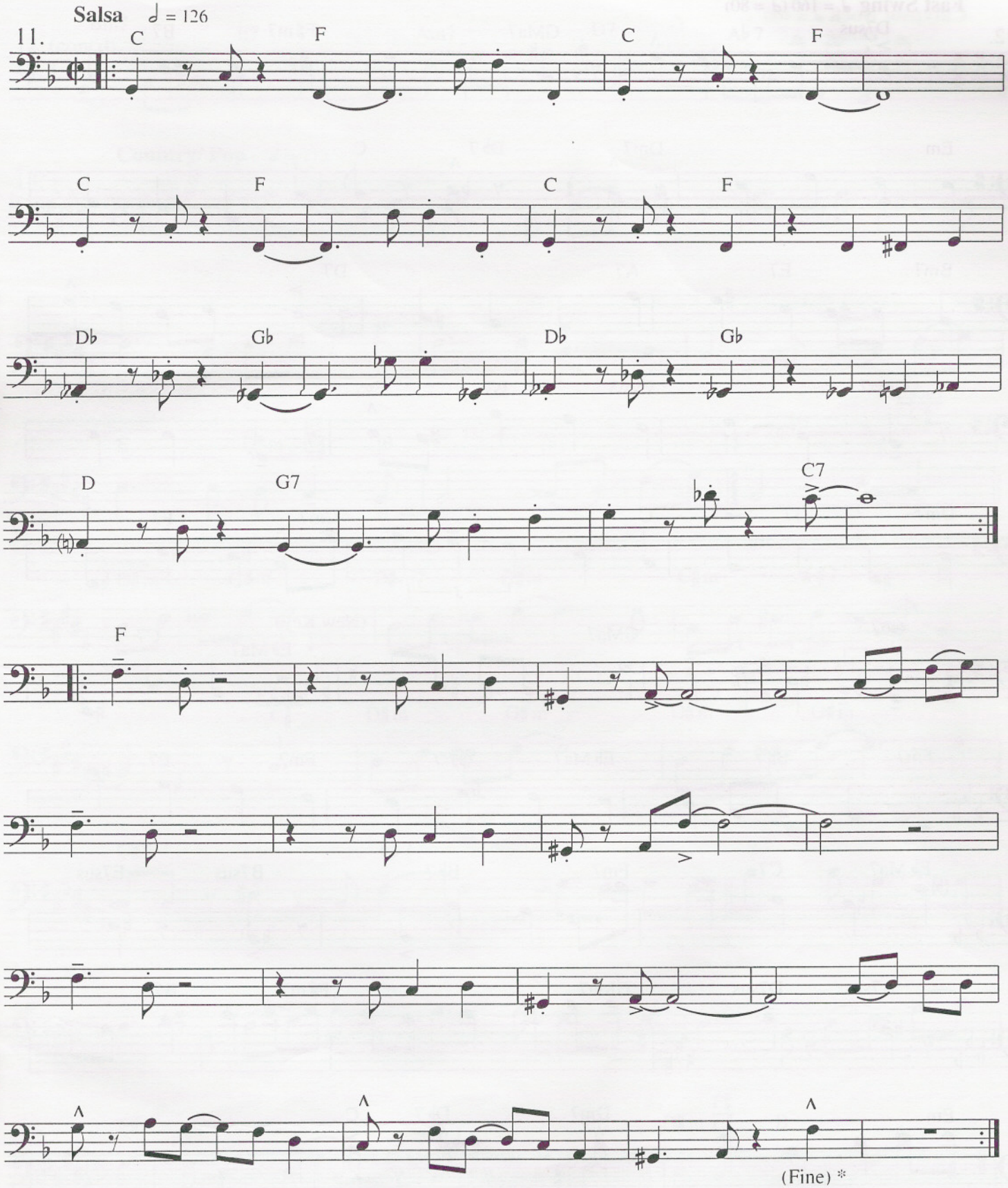
* Strum this group of notes


Fast Funk ♩ = 138
7.
C7
Eb 7
Ab 7
A7
Bb 7
B7
C7
2
Eb 7
Ab 7
C7
8.
Funk Ballad ♩ = 66
Cm
Cm/ Bb
F/ A
Fm/ Ab
Bb 7sus
G7+/ B
Cm
Cm/ Bb
F/ A
F
F#o
Gsus
Bb 7sus
Eb ma7
D ∅
G7b 9
Cm7
F7

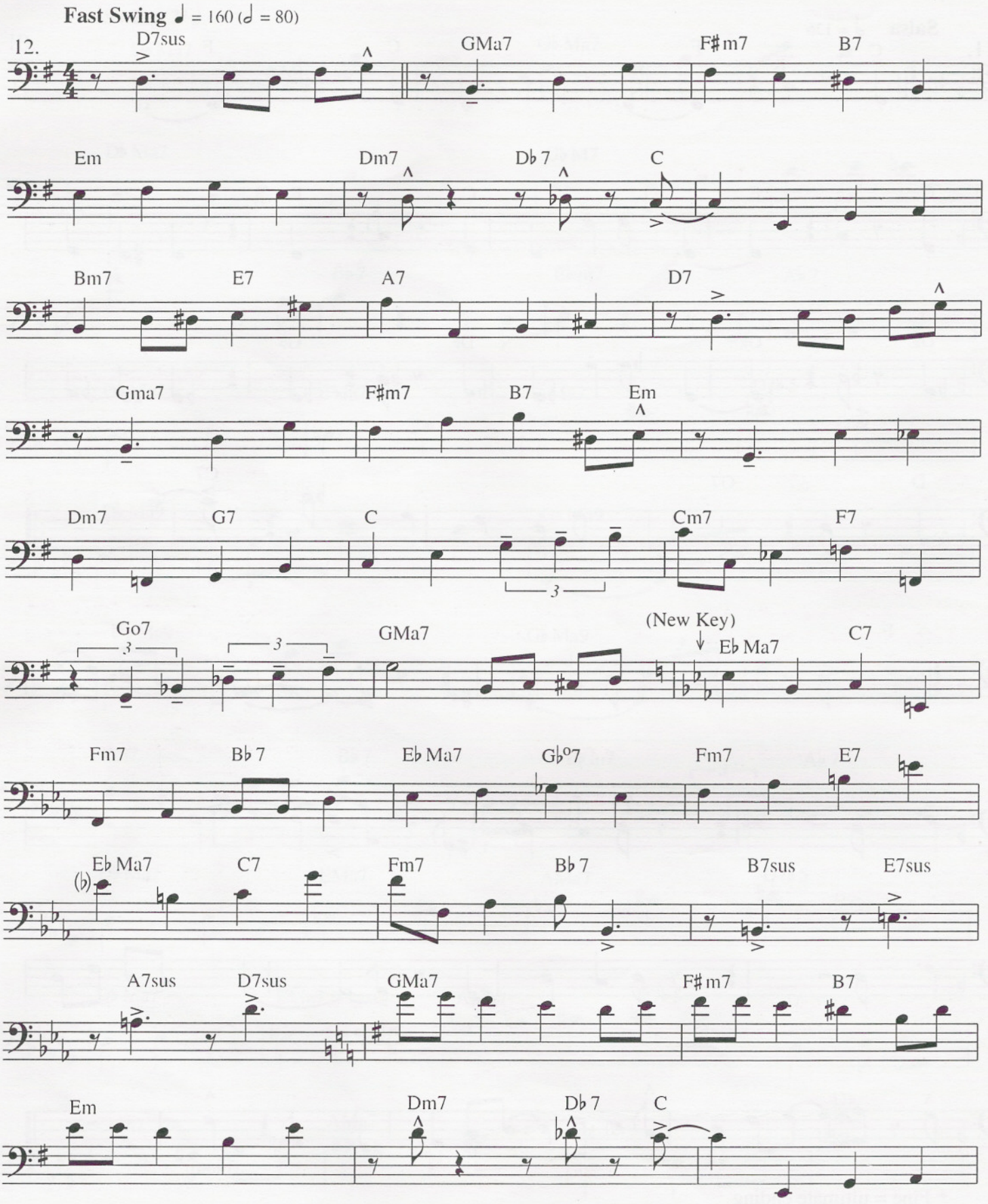


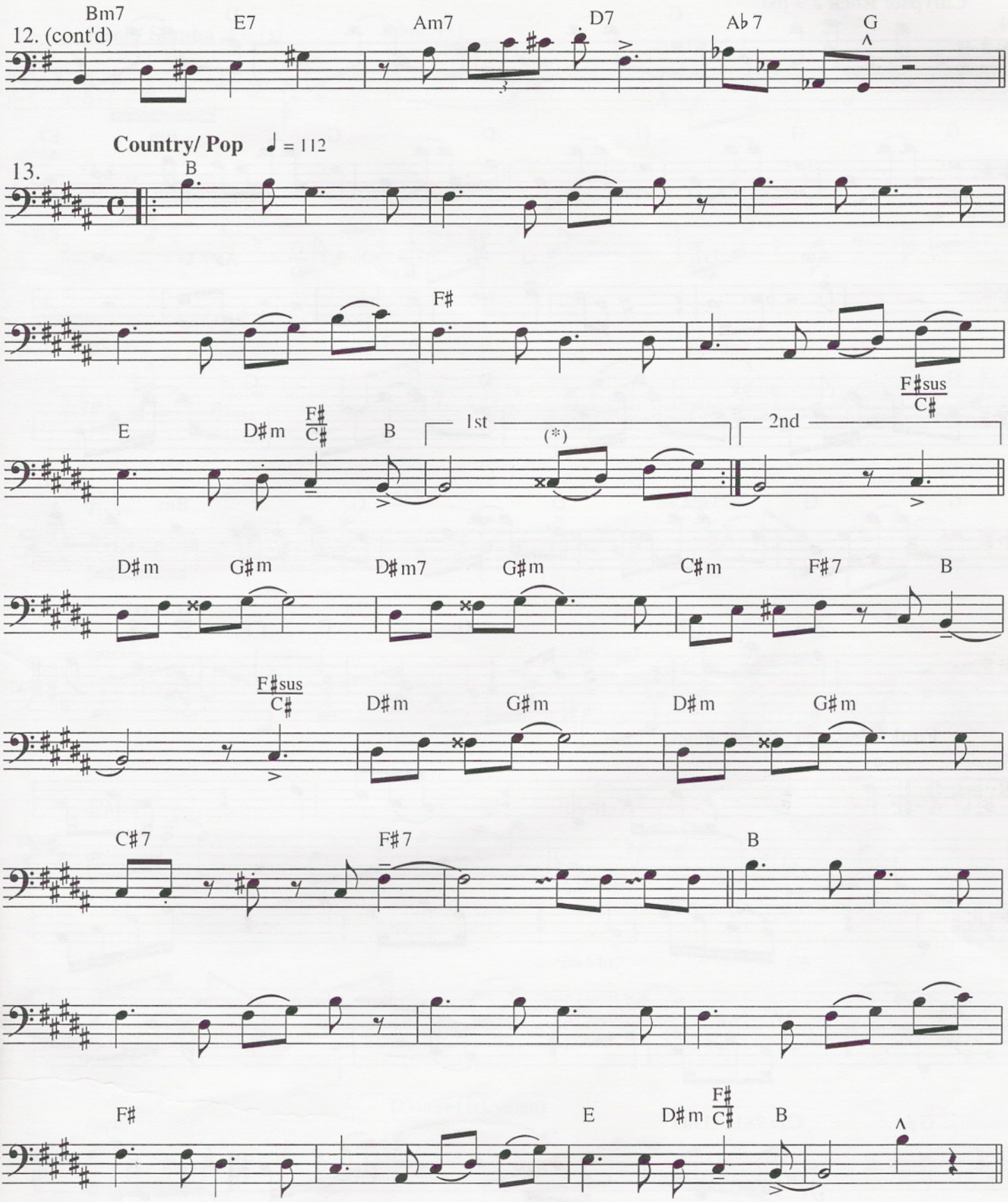
* Duplet: fits into time-space of three regular notes


Swing '3' ♩ = 132
10.
Db Ma7
Gb Ma7
Db Ma7
Gb M7
Fm7
Bb 7
Eb m7
Ab 7
Db Ma7
EMa7
AMa7
D7b 5
Db Ma9
Gb Ma9
Db Ma9
Gb Ma9
Fm7
Bb 7
Eb m7
Ab 7
Db Ma7
EMa7
AMa7
D7b 5
Db Ma7
EMa7
AMa7
D7b 5
Db Ma7
EMa7
AMa7
D7b5
Db

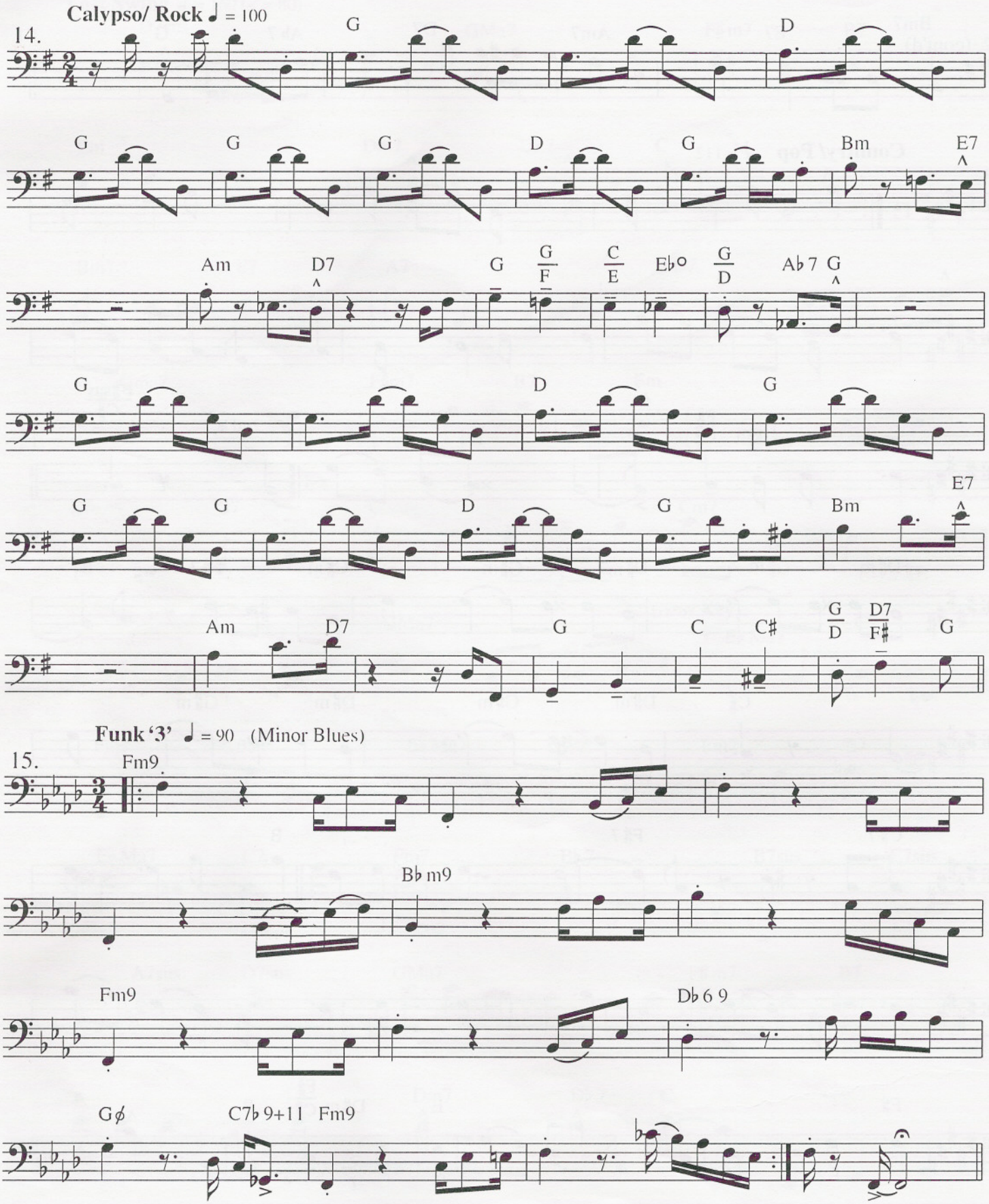


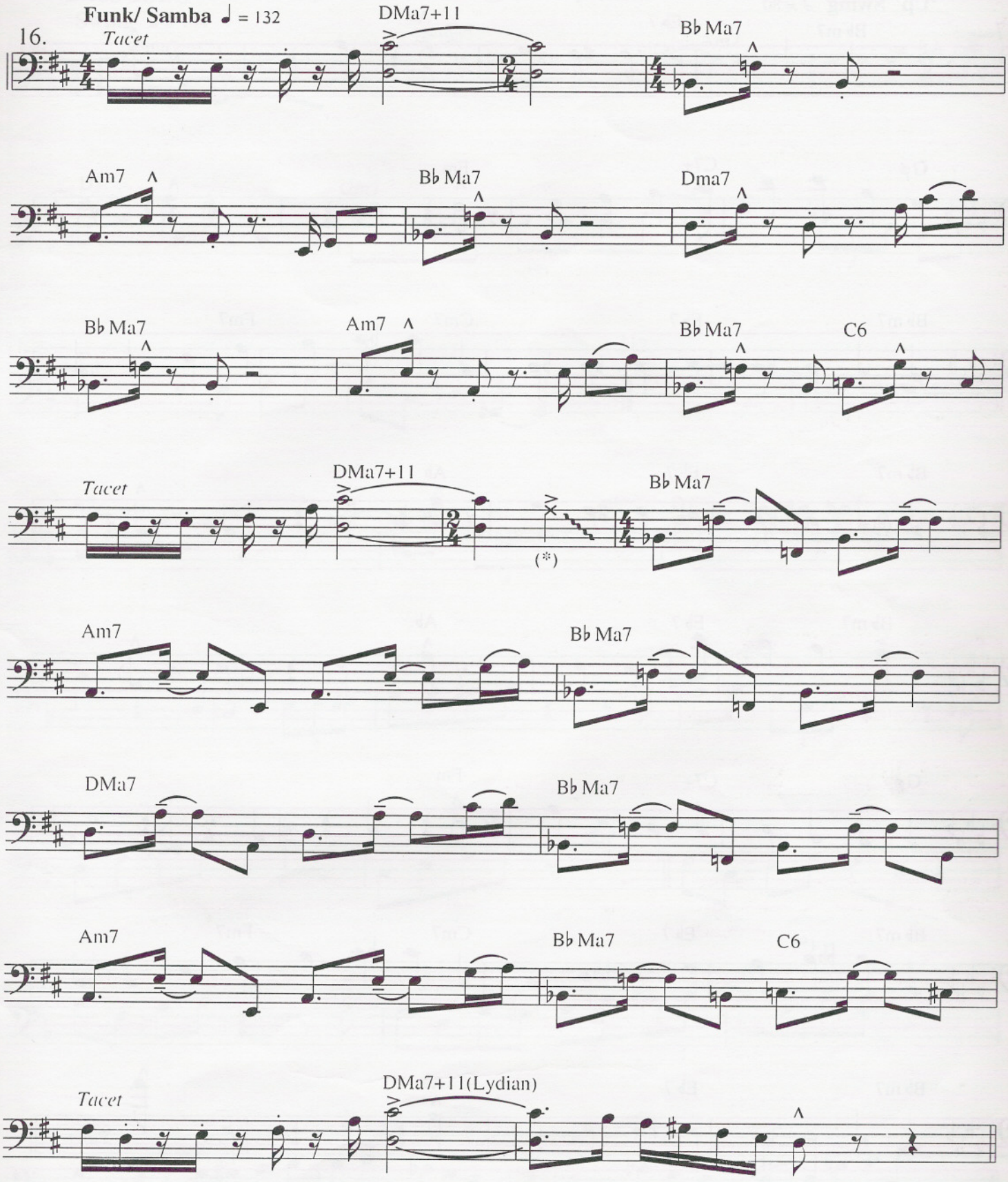
* Fine = ultimate ending


Fast Swing ♩ = 160 (𝅗𝅥 = 80)
12.
D7sus
GMa7
F♯m7
B7
Em
Dm7
D♭7
C
Bm7
E7
A7
D7
Gma7
F♯m7
B7
Em
Dm7
G7
C
Cm7
F7
3
Go7
3
3
GMa7
(New Key)
E♭Ma7
C7
Fm7
B♭7
E♭Ma7
G♭°7
Fm7
E7
E♭Ma7
C7
Fm7
B♭7
B7sus
E7sus
A7sus
D7sus
GMa7
F♯m7
B7
Em
Dm7
D♭7
C

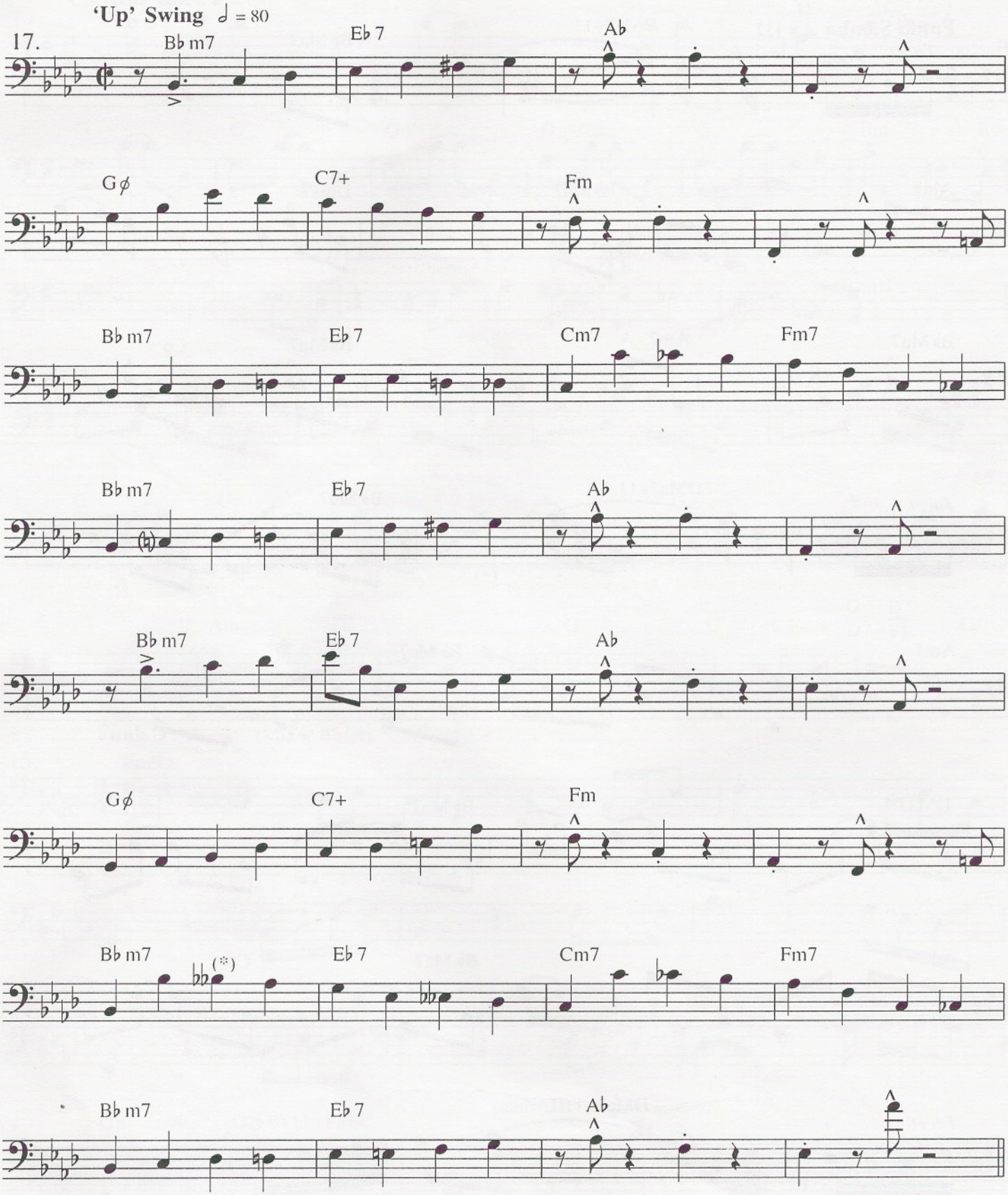


* = Double sharp/half-step higher than sharp note.


Calypso/ Rock ♩ = 100
14.
G
D
G
G
G
D
G
Bm
E7
Am
D7
G
G/F
C/E
E♭o
G/D
A♭7
G
G
D
G
G
G
D
G
Bm
E7
Am
D7
G
C
C♯
G/D
D7/F♯
G
Funk '3' ♩ = 90 (Minor Blues)
15.
Fm9
B♭m9
Fm9
D♭6 9
Gø
C7♭9+11
Fm9



* = approximate pitch

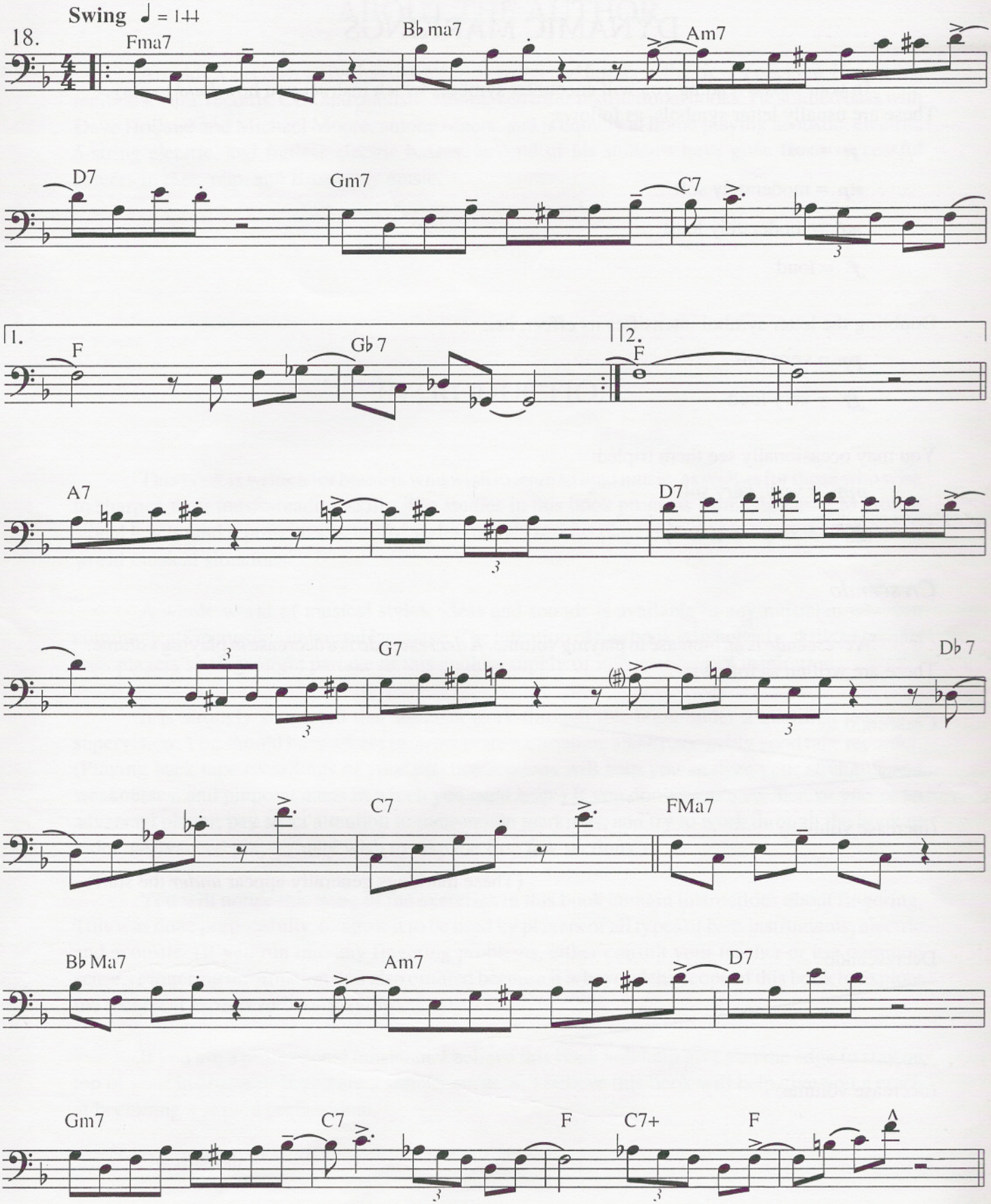


* = Double flat/half-step lower than flat note.

BASS SOLO

Swing ♩ = 144

Play with chordal background if possible



DYNAMIC MARKINGS

In your music reading you will encounter symbols which instruct you how *loud* to play. These are usually letter symbols, as follows:

p = soft

mp = moderately soft

mf = moderately loud

f = loud

Doubling the letter symbol intensifies its effect, i.e.:

pp = very soft

ff = very loud

You may occasionally see them tripled:

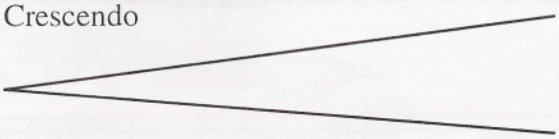
ppp = very, very soft

fff = very, very loud

Crescendo

A *crescendo* is an increase in playing volume. A *decrescendo* is a decrease in playing volume. These are written as follows:

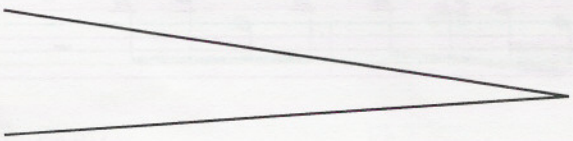
Crescendo



(increase volume)

(These markings generally appear *under* the staff)

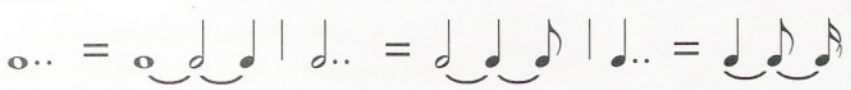
Decrescendo



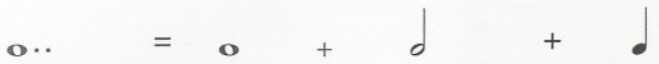
(decrease volume)

DOUBLE-DOTTED NOTES

Placing a double dot after a note multiplies its time-space value by 1 3/4.



In actuality, you simply add the *next 2* rhythmic subdivisions to the original note, i.e.:



Double-dotted whole note	=	orig. (whole)	+	next subd. (half)	+	next subd. (quarter)

AFTERWORD

I hope that you have made considerable progress with your music-reading skills by working through this book. It's important now that you continue to get involved in as many music-reading situations as possible so you will gain valuable experience and confidence in your abilities.

Music-reading is a very important skill which, when combined with *technique* and *theory*, will round out your professional capabilities.

May you continue to expand your musical horizons!